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Planning Statement

Universal Square, Devonshire Street North,
Manchester M12 6JH

Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of
Cypresshawk Ltd

December 2024

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ON BEHALF OF
CYPRESSHAWK LTD

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Planning Statement
UNIVERSAL SQUARE, DEVONSHIRE STREET NORTH,
MANCHESTER M12 6JH

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Icen Projects Limited ('Icen') on behalf of Cypresshawk Ltd ("the Applicant") in support of a planning application at Universal Square, Manchester ('the site') for the: -

Change of use of up to 55,000sqft of floorspace from offices (Class E) to a flexible commercial, business and service (Class E) and learning and non-residential institutions use (Class F.1) pursuant to Schedule 2, Part 3, Class V of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.

Purpose of this statement

- 1.3 The purpose of this Planning Statement is to provide Manchester City Council (the Local Planning Authority – 'LPA') with an overall summary of the existing site and surroundings, the relevant planning history for the site, and to provide justification for the Proposed Development in the context of the LPA Development Plan and national planning policies.
- 1.4 The statement is structured as follows:
- Section 2 describes the application site and its surroundings and outlines the planning history of the site.
 - Section 3 describes the proposed development.
 - Section 4 identifies the planning policies relevant to the determination of the application.
 - Section 5 assesses the proposal against the key planning considerations; and
 - Section 6 concludes that planning permission should be granted.
- 1.5 This application has been submitted with the following supporting documents: -
- Transport Assessment – prepared by SLR Transport.
 - Floorplans showing existing areas already occupied by GBS, prepared by Coda

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- Cycle Parking plan, prepared by Coda.
 - Car parking plan, prepared by Coda.
 - Waste Proforma, prepared by the Applicant.

2. SITE AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL CONTEXT

The Site

- 2.1 The site is known as Universal Square and is comprised of five refurbished, interlinked buildings, all congregated around a courtyard. There is a total of just over 258,000 sq. ft. of floorspace, with most occupied as traditional B1 (now Use Class E) offices. The remainder of the site consists of a Gym, Restaurant and Storage area.
- 2.2 Universal Square has developed as a high-quality business premises that suits modern business needs. As it has modernised and adapted over the years, the types of occupiers at Universal Square have broadened and now include higher education operators such as the Global Banking School.
- 2.3 The A665 Devonshire Street North binds the site to the west, the railway line that runs out of Manchester Piccadilly Rail Station to the east and north, and a Stagecoach Bus Depot and self-storage unit to the south.
- 2.4 Universal Square benefits from its accessible location, being less than 1.5km from Manchester City Centre. A wide number of bus services are within 500m of the site, Ardwick Train Station is within walking distance, and cycle storage, car parking, and a shuttle bus are also available on site.

The Global Banking School

- 2.5 The Global Banking School ('GBS') is a higher education provider offering a range of industry-focused courses across four campuses in London, Manchester, and Birmingham. GBS partners with several leading UK universities to deliver vocational, undergraduate, and postgraduate programmes to typically under-represented groups. GBS began as a specialist training centre for investment banking before moving into higher education delivery in 2012, focusing on management disciplines. Today GBS offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Health and Social Care, Business and Enterprise, Global Business, and Healthcare Management. They have added courses in Computing, Finance, Accounting, and Entrepreneurship courses as part of their gradual expansion at Universal Square.
- 2.6 GBS aims to widen education access for traditionally under-represented groups in the sector. Almost all their students are mature, have working-class backgrounds, and are from the BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) demographic – all groups which are extremely under-represented in higher education. GBS students are not only people who can't but ordinarily wouldn't access mainstream universities – for several reasons, partly because they don't see themselves fitting in at traditional academic institutions. GBS' goal, therefore, is not only to help students "climb the educational ladder" but also to give them the confidence to believe that higher education is for them.

GBS' presence at Universal Square

- 2.7 Universal Square comprises five refurbished, interlinked buildings, all congregated around a courtyard. It has just over 258,000 sq. ft of floorspace, with most occupied as a traditional Use Class E office or for educational purposes (by GBS). The remainder of the site consists of a gym, restaurant, and storage area.
- 2.8 GBS currently occupy circa 48,000 sq. ft at the site, within buildings 3 and 4. This has been achieved through the following planning applications made on-site: -
- **Phase 1** – 9,213 sq. Ft granted permission in August 2019 (planning permission reference 22962/FU/2019)
 - **Phase 2** – 9,256.96 sq. Ft granted planning permissions in August 2020 (planning permission reference. 126193/FO/2020)
 - **Phase 3** – up to 30,000sq. ft granted planning permission in November 2021 (Planning permission reference: 130541/FO/2021)
- 2.9 The total existing capacity of Universal Square, based on the current permission, is 6,600 students.
- 2.10 GBS are looking to further expand at Universal Square, to take on an additional 55,000sq. ft of floorspace.

Why Universal Square?

Accessible location

- 2.11 GBS wishes to expand its presence at Universal Square instead of relocating. The current site is attractive to its students and is also very accessible, considering that around 95% of the students and most staff are local to the Greater Manchester area. Students already benefit from a shuttle bus service between Universal Square and Manchester Piccadilly station.
- 2.12 The students have deep ties to their local communities. Unlike students from traditional universities, GBS students, for the most part, live at home whilst studying, with a high proportion of students coming from the local area, including communities close to the existing campus, such as Ardwick.

Minimising Disruption To Students

- 2.13 A key aim of GBS's education provision is to provide flexibility- they operate a highly flexible timetable at the Manchester campus and provide evening and weekend classes as well as classes during school hours. All courses are also offered on a part-time and full-time basis. GBS believe it would cause a major disruption to their students' academic journeys (particularly for those on longer

courses) if they were to move to a different location, as this could create a split-site situation where some students remain at the old campus, and others move to a new one – with others perhaps even having to take different modules at different campuses.

- 2.14 In addition, as many of the students are from the site's immediate vicinity, the premises offer convenience and mean that those with families or childcare arrangements nearby can maintain this element.

Lack of suitable alternative sites

- 2.15 Finding another site of the same quality in the same area would also be very challenging and is an unnecessary expense to GBS, considering the benefits that exist at the Universal Square campus, particularly as it now an established campus.

Attractiveness of the premises

- 2.16 The Universal Square campus already has supporting facilities which lend themselves to the higher education offer, such as a fitness centre, open air courtyard amenity space, restaurant and shop, as well as parking and cycling storage. The close connection to several existing businesses within Universal Square is also extremely advantageous to a higher education offer which prides itself on its high-quality careers and employability services. Students are offered workshops and one-on-one sessions with career advisers throughout their academic journey – including help with writing CVs, making job applications, successfully preparing for interviews, and setting up a new or growing an existing business. GBS's links with local employers allow it to provide work placements and job opportunities for many of its students, and some of these opportunities are with businesses at Universal Square. In addition, hosting students within an environment containing professionals and a wide range of businesses ensures students are accustomed to a busy working environment and provides informal networking and business opportunities. This contrasts with more 'academically focussed' university campuses and benefits GBS's course offerings, which include business and enterprise studies.

3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 This document section sets out the proposed development and should be read in conjunction with the supporting documentation, particularly SLR's Transport Assessment.
- 3.2 The description of development reads as follows: -

Change of use of up to 55,000sqft of floorspace from offices (Class E) to a flexible commercial, business and service (Class E) and learning and non-residential institutions use (Class F.1) pursuant to Schedule 2, Part 3, Class V of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.

Summary of the proposed development

- 3.3 GBS have recently requested additional floorspace within Universal Square from the landlord to support the ongoing expansion of their operations in Manchester. The increase totals 55,000 sq. ft, meaning that GBS will occupy 103,000 sq. ft out of 258,139 sq. ft available across the site. The reasoning behind this proposed expansion is the successful uptake in students, following the high demand for the existing courses on offer and the newly introduced courses in Construction Management and Digital Technologies.
- 3.4 The proposed floorspace is expected to take the site's total capacity to 10,474 students (by January 2027), meaning a total net increase of 3,874 students and an additional 168 staff.

Key Benefits

- 3.5 Several key benefits are generated from the proposed flexible change of use, as follows:
- Supporting the expansion of a higher education institute which will support an estimated 10,474 students from typically under-represented minority groups (by 2027).
 - Increased spending in the local economy and support for small businesses in the surrounding area through the increased student population.
 - Provide training courses in vocational, industry-related undergraduate, and postgraduate programmes, upskill members of the local community, address skills shortages in local employment sectors, and support the growth of new businesses and start-ups.
 - Providing employment opportunities for circa 168 additional staff by 2027, including teaching and lecturing posts and administrative roles.

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- Supporting the continued operation of Universal Square as a high-quality commercial premise, reducing vacancy rates caused by a shift to flexible/home working created by the Covid pandemic.

4. POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

4.1 This section provides an overview on Manchester City Council's Development Plan and other material considerations relevant to the consideration of these proposals, as required by Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). In the context of this application, planning policy operates at two levels:

- **National |** Development needs to comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) ('NPPF') and supporting guidance in the form of National Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG').
- **Regional |** The development needs to consider the policies contained within Places for Everyone ('Pfe'), the regional planning policy document for Greater Manchester, adopted in March 2024.
- **Local |** Manchester City Council's Core Strategy (2012) guides development in the local area, alongside the interactive proposals map and the extant policies from the Unitary Development Plan.

National Policy – The NPPF

4.2 The revised National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'), published in December 2024, sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied by Local Authorities and Applicants. Relevant extracts from the NPPF are summarised below: -

Achieving Sustainable Development

4.3 Paragraph 11 is clear that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Decision Making

4.4 As outlined in paragraph 2, planning law dictates that planning applications should be determined in line with the Development Plan and within the statutory timescales unless otherwise agreed.

Widening Choice in Education

4.5 Paragraph 100 notes that 'local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to [...] development that will widen choice in education'.

Impact on Highway Safety

4.6 Paragraph 116 is clear that 'Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios'.

Local Policy – The Local Plan

- 4.7 Whilst the site is unallocated according to the interactive policies map, the following policies will still be of relevance when determining the planning application:
- Policy EC 1 (Employment and Economic Growth in Manchester): The city centre fringe areas are key locations for major employment growth.
 - Policy EC 2 (Existing Employment Space): The Council will seek to retain and enhance existing employment spaces and sites.
 - Policy SP 1 (Spatial Principles) - Development in all parts of the City should improve access to jobs, services, education and open space.
 - Policy DM 1 (Development Management) states that development should consider the surrounding area's character.
 - Policy T1 (Sustainable Transport): The Council will support proposals that promote regeneration and economic vitality by relieving traffic congestion and improving access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need and those without a car.
 - Policy T2 (Accessible areas of opportunity and need) - The Council will actively manage development patterns to ensure that new development is easily accessible by walking, cycling and public transport, connecting residents to jobs, centres, health, leisure, open space and educational opportunities.
- 4.8 There are no relevant supplementary planning documents to consider.

5. KEY PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 This section assesses the key planning considerations relevant to the determination of this application, which we consider to be the principle of the change of use to an educational facility and the associated highway impacts.

Principle of Development

- 5.2 It is acknowledged that whilst the site is unallocated within the Council's interactive policies map, the principle of reducing the amount of available office floor space should be addressed as a planning consideration, as the role of the site as a high-quality employment offering outside of the city centre shouldn't be diluted. This is supported by Core Strategy Policy EC2, which states that:

The Council will seek to retain and enhance existing employment space and sites. Alternative uses will only be supported on sites allocated accordingly or if it can be demonstrated that:

- *The existing use is un-viable in terms of business operations, building age and format.*
- *The existing use is incompatible with adjacent uses.*
- *The existing use is unsuitable for employment having had regard to the Manchester Salford - Trafford SFRA; or*
- *On balance, proposals are able to offer greater benefits in terms of the Core Strategy's vision and spatial objectives than the existing use.*

- 5.3 In this regard, whilst this policy seeks to protect employment floorspace, offices are now considered under the broader Class E planning use class, encompassing a wide range of 'commercial, business and service' uses designed to encourage a more flexible planning system. As such, the floorspace within Universal Square could, in effect, change use from a traditional office to the following uses without requiring planning permission:

- E (a) Display or retail sale of goods other than hot food
- E(b) Sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) on the premises
- E(c) Provision of:
 - E(c)(i) Financial services,
 - E(c)(ii) Professional services (other than health or medical services), or
 - E(c)(iii) Other appropriate services in a commercial, business or service locality
 - E(d) Indoor sport, recreation or fitness (not involving motorised vehicles or firearms)
- E(e) Provision of medical or health services (except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner)
- E(f) Creche, day nursery or day centre (not including a residential use)

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- E(g) Uses which can be carried out in a residential area without detriment to its amenity:
 - E(g)(i) Offices to carry out any operational or administrative functions,
 - E(g)(ii) Research and development of products or processes
 - E(g)(iii) Industrial processes

5.4 The weight afforded to Policy EC2 has therefore weakened significantly. Considering this, we would argue that introducing class F1 (Learning and non-residential institutions) floorspace is unlikely to negatively impact the overall site as an employment offer, compared to the potential changes already permitted through use class E.

Principle of Flexible Use

5.5 Like the previous planning permission at the site, the latest proposal for the change of use of 55,000sq. ft of office space will be secured pursuant to Schedule 2, Part 3, Class V of the General Permitted Development Order ('GPDO') (2015). This allows "development consisting of a change of use of a building or other land from use permitted by planning permission granted on an application, to another use which that permission would have specifically authorised when it was granted".

Development is not permitted under Class V if:

(a) The application for planning permission referred to was made before 5th December 1988.

(b) It would be carried out more than 10 years after the grant of planning permission.

(c) The development would consist of a change of use of a building to use as betting office or pay day loan shop.

(d) It would result in the breach of any condition, limitation or specification contained in that planning permission in relation to the use in question.

5.6 The application would be acceptable when considered against these criteria and it is anticipated that the change to Class F1 floorspace would be complete within a three-year period, although this is subject to being shortened or extended.

5.7 The decision to utilise Class V will therefore allow GBS to expand flexibly over time but will also allow the floorspace to be converted back to offices easily should GBS reduce their requirements and scale back their expansion plans. This provides the Council with comfort that a traditional employment use could be easily reinstated.

Benefits of the proposal

- 5.8 Notwithstanding the uses allowed under Class E and the dilution of Core Strategy Policy EC2, Cypresshawk can demonstrate that they meet the final bullet point of the local policy test, as the proposal can demonstrate that it offers 'greater benefits in terms of the Core Strategy's vision and spatial objectives than the existing use' by retaining and allowing the expansion of a specialist educational provider aimed at disadvantaged students.
- 5.9 As the students have deep ties to the local area and many have existing businesses or enterprises that they want to grow following their education, GBS' education generates broader economic gains, often creating new employment opportunities in the local community.
- 5.10 Though most of the students don't have the qualifications that would enable them to enter traditional higher educational establishments, GBS consider work and life experience as well as other latent talents and potential as part of their recruitment process. They also offer Foundation Year programmes that act as an entry point to gaining a bachelor's degree, and many of these students have later gone on to pursue postgraduate qualifications, thereby upskilling communities that are often overlooked, such as the BAME demographic.
- 5.11 GBS provides training and courses across various sectors, including Healthcare Management. They aim to produce healthcare management professionals who can help meet the dearth in healthcare provision and contribute to reinforcing local health and social care services—an area now even more crucial in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the societal side effects that have occurred as a result. Courses like this enhance the skill level of Manchester's workforce, increasing their employability and the region's attractiveness to investors and businesses, clearly generating employment benefits.

Marketing of employment floorspace

- 5.12 MCR have confirmed that the take up of office space at Universal Square still faces challenges owing to the site's fringe location and quality of space. Evidence of this is readily available; a large occupier who currently lease 28,000 sq. ft have recently confirmed that they will not be renewing their lease and are instead relocating into Grade A accommodation in the City Centre in 2025.
- 5.13 Other than lettings completed to GBS as they have expanded in the building as per their planning permissions, MCR have not completed a letting to a new tenant to the building of over 4,000 sq. ft since July 2021 (Reed In Partnership Ltd).
- 5.14 The largest volume of transactions remains in the smaller office suite sizes at Universal Square and larger spaces are becoming more difficult to let, with the 'flight for quality' impacting upon demand for sites such as Universal Square.

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- 5.15 It is imperative that the Council support the ability of fringe office sites such as Universal Square to become more flexibly used, to avoid edge of city sites from stagnating.

Highway Impact

- 5.16 This planning application is supported by a Transport Assessment carried out by SLR Transport. This document considered the impacts of the proposal on the local road network and considers the site's baseline conditions, accessibility, likely trip generation and car parking demand. Whilst the transport assessment should be read in conjunction with this report, we have summarised the key points below: -

- The site is well-connected to a developed road network with no safety issues and ample on-street and off-street parking.
- The site offers excellent accessibility by walking, cycling, and public transport, with footways, cycle lanes, and bus routes nearby. A free shuttle bus connects Universal Square to Manchester Piccadilly Station.
- Peak traffic from the development occurs during inter-peak periods, not during typical rush hours, allowing the highway network to handle additional demand.
- Vehicle trip forecasts are based on current single-occupancy car use, but the development's travel planning strategy aims to reduce car use through sustainable transport options.
- Universal Square allocates parking at one space per 350sq.ft, with the GBS Phase 4 expansion allowing for 137 additional allocated car parking spaces, totalling 294 spaces to GBS. This exceeds MCC standards but is in line with the site's floorspace allocation policy, already accepted by MCC on previous applications.
- The parking demand is not expected to impact nearby parking significantly, with additional off-site car parks and on-street parking available within walking distance for students.

- 5.17 SLR has provided the previously prepared Travel Plan (May 2021) within the appendices of the Transport Assessment. The Travel Plan has been reviewed by SLR in the context of the latest travel survey undertaken for this application to demonstrate that it is still valid.

- 5.18 The proposal is in accordance with paragraph 116 of the NPPF; the development will not create an unacceptable impact on highway safety, and the residual cumulative impacts on the road network will not be severe, and as such, the development should not be prevented or refused on highways grounds

Building Management

- 5.19 With the introduction of additional students on site, Cypresshawk will work with GBS to ensure that the building is managed effectively to minimise disruption to other businesses on the premises.

Waste

- 5.20 There are already provision in place for waste management, as detailed in the waste proforma submitted to the previous planning application for GBS' expansion. GBS have a weekly entitlement to general waste and pulvable recycling bins, and this will either be increased in accordance with the additional students on site or the frequency of collections will be increased each week.

Security

- 5.21 Access to GBS' premises is restricted to staff and students who all have a key card that permits entry. Equally, staff and student entry to other areas of Universal Square is restricted. The educational use on-site can, therefore, safely coexist with a variety of neighbouring commercial businesses.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This planning statement has been prepared on behalf of Cypresshawk Ltd (the 'Applicant'), in relation to Universal Square, Manchester, In support of a full planning application for:

Change of use of up to 55,000sqft of floorspace from offices (Class E) to a flexible commercial, business and service (Class E) and learning and non-residential institutions use (Class F.1) pursuant to Schedule 2, Part 3, Class V of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015.

- 6.2 This application demonstrates that the proposal is in accordance with the NPPF, particularly paragraph 116 concerning the proposal's impact on the highway network.
- 6.3 In addition, whilst the weight afforded to policy EC2, which seeks to protect existing employment spaces such as offices, has been weakened through the introduction of flexible Use Class E, the proposal can clearly meet the final bullet point of the local policy test, demonstrating that the development can offer significant benefits, supporting both national and local planning policy.
- 6.4 There are several key benefits derived from the proposed flexible change of use up to 30,000sq. ft of floorspace to educational use, which allows the application to meet the policy test within the core strategy Policy EC2, including: -
- Supporting the expansion of a higher education institute that will serve an estimated 10,474 students (by 2027) from typically underrepresented minority groups.
 - Increased spending in the local economy and support for small businesses in the surrounding area through the increased student population.
 - Provide training courses in vocational, industry-related undergraduate, and postgraduate programmes, upskill local community members, address skills shortages in local employment sectors, and support the growth of new business start-ups.
 - Providing employment opportunities for an additional circa 168 staff, including teaching and lecturing posts and administrative roles.
 - Supporting the continued operation of Universal Square as a high-quality commercial premise, reducing vacancy rates caused by a shift to flexible/home working created by the Covid pandemic.

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- 6.5 Considering the policy position and planning benefits generated by this proposal, we respectfully request that the planning permission be approved without delay.