Government Property Agency

AtkinsRéalis



MANCHESTER DIGITAL CAMPUS

Environmental Statement
Volume 2 - Chapter 1-5: Introduction chapters

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. This Environmental Statement (ES) has been prepared in support of the proposals for the Phase 1 development at the Former Central Retail Park (FCRP) in New Islington in Greater Manchester (herein referred to as the 'Site'), see ES (Volume 5) Figure 1.1.

1.1.2. This ES is submitted in support of the full planning application submitted by the Government Property Agency (GPA) (herein referred to as the 'Applicant') for the new Manchester Digital Campus (MDC) (herein referred to as the 'Proposed Development').

1.1.3. The Proposed Development comprises of a new civil service office campus, public realm, landscaping and also forming the new ground levels for the proposed new park, with the design of the park being submitted as a separate planning application by Manchester City Council.

1.1.4. AtkinsRéalis have been commissioned by the Applicant to prepare an ES, in line with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the "EIA Regulations").

1.1.5. The ES sets out the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) carried out in respect of the Proposed Development, which is described in Chapter 1.5.2.

1.1.6. This chapter is supported by Figure 1.1 contained within ES (Volume 5) which shows the proposed EIA boundary for the Proposed Development.

1.1.7. It is worth noting that the Planning Red Line Boundary includes Hugh Oldham Way. However, since this access will be used only by emergency vehicles during operation and no works will be undertaken, it has not been included in the EIA boundary. Hugh Oldham Way is currently used for access to the Co-Op Academy New Islington.

1.2. EIA requirements

1.2.1. The EIA Regulations implement amendments to European Union (EU) Directive 2011/92/EU contained within the European Directive 2014/52/EU. They apply to the assessment of environmental impacts that are likely to arise from certain types of public and private projects.

1.2.2. EIA is a systematic process during which potential significant environmental effects from a proposed development project are identified and assessed, and the scope for minimising these is presented to the relevant decision maker in an ES accompanying a planning application.

1.2.3. The aim of the EIA is to provide the competent authority with the information necessary to consider potential significant environmental effects (both negative and positive), to ascertain whether these are acceptable, and, where appropriate, to secure mitigation measures to minimise negative impacts prior to granting relevant consents.

1.2.4. The EIA Regulations set out thresholds for certain types of projects that by their scale or nature require an EIA to be prepared. Under the EIA Regulations, an ES must be submitted with planning applications for "EIA Development". EIA Development may be:

- Schedule 1 Development - development of a description set out at Schedule 1; and
- Schedule 2 Development - likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location: where Schedule 2 Development is development of a description mentioned in column 1 of Schedule 2, where the relevant thresholds in column 2 are exceeded or any part of the development is in a “sensitive area”, e.g., Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Park.

1.2.5. Schedule 1 Development always requires EIA. Schedule 2 Development requires EIA if it is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

1.2.6. Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations describes the criteria that must be taken into account in determining whether a development, which falls within the size threshold applicable to Schedule 2 Development, is likely to have significant impacts and hence should be subject to EIA. These include:

- The characteristics of the development;
- The environmental sensitivity of the location; and
- The characteristics of the potential impact.

1.2.7. The Proposed Development falls under Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations 10(b) Urban development projects. The applicable threshold above which EIA is likely to be required includes for (i) development of more than 1 hectare (ha) of urban development that is not a dwelling house, or (ii) if the development includes more than 150 dwellings, or, (iii) if the overall development is over 5 hectares (ha).

1.2.8. The Proposed Development is not in a sensitive area however, it covers an area of 2.8 ha and therefore exceeds the threshold as set out in Schedule 2 indicating that EIA is likely required. Given the nature of the Proposed Development, an EIA is considered appropriate to test the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development. The Applicant therefore proposes to submit an ES in relation to all topic areas where there are potential effects on the environment in support of the planning application.

1.2.9. AtkinsRéalis produced a Scoping Report for the Proposed Development, which was submitted to Manchester City Council (MCC) on 30th September 2024, MCC reviewed the Scoping Report and provided a Scoping Opinion November 2024, Full details of this are included in Chapter 4: EIA Approach and methodology.

1.2.10. Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations details information that that should be included within an ES. The location of information within the ES is in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 – Location of information within the ES

Specified Information		Location within the ES
1.	A description of the development, including in particular:	See below.
a)	A description of the location of the development.	Volume 2 – Chapter 2: Description of the Site and Proposed Development.
b)	A description of the physical characteristics of the whole development, including, where relevant, requisite demolition works, and the land-use requirements during the construction and operational phases;	Volume 2 – Chapter 2: Description of the Site and Proposed Development and Volume 2 – Chapter 6: Construction Phasing and Methodology.
c)	A description of the main characteristics of the operational phase of the development (in particular any production process), for instance, energy demand and energy used, nature and quantity of the materials and natural resources (including water, land, soil and biodiversity) used;	Volume 2 – Chapter 2: Description of the Site and Proposed Development.

Specified Information		Location within the ES
d)	An estimate, by type and quantity, of expected residues and emissions (such as water, air, soil and subsoil pollution, noise, vibration, light, heat, radiation and quantities and types of waste produced during the construction and operation phases.	All Volume 2 technical chapters (chapters 7 to 21) and Volume 3 – Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
2.	A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example in terms of development design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects	Volume 2 – Chapter 5: Alternatives Considered and Design Evolution.
3.	A description of the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment (baseline scenario) and an outline of the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the development as far as natural changes from the baseline scenario can be assessed with reasonable effort on the basis of the availability of environmental information and scientific knowledge.	Volume 2 – Chapter 5: Alternatives Considered and Design Evolution and Volume 2 – Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant).
4.	A description of the factors specified in regulation 4(2) likely to be significantly affected by the development: population, human health, biodiversity (for example fauna and flora), land (for example land take), soil (for example organic matter, erosion, compaction, sealing), water (for example hydromorphological changes, quantity and quality), air, climate (for example greenhouse gas emissions, impacts relevant to adaptation), material assets, cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological aspects, and landscape.	Volume 2 – Chapter 22: Cumulative Effects and Volume 2 – Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant).
5.	A description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment resulting from, inter alia:	See below.
a)	The construction and existence of the development, including, where relevant, demolition works;	Volume 2 – Chapter 6: Construction Phasing and Methodology.
b)	The use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity, considering as far as possible the sustainable availability of these resources;	Volume 2 – Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant) and Alternatives Considered and Design Evolution.
c)	The emission of pollutants, noise, vibration, light, heat and radiation, the creation of nuisances, and the disposal and recovery of waste;	Volume 2 – Chapter 7: Air Quality, Volume 2 – Chapter 16: Noise and Vibration, Volume 2 – Chapter 11: Daylight, Sunlight, Overshadowing and Solar Glare, and Volume 2 – Chapter 15: Materials and Waste
d)	The risks to human health, cultural heritage or the environment (for example due to accidents or disasters);	All Volume 2 technical chapters (chapters 7 to 21), and Volume 3 – Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
e)	The cumulation of effects with other existing and/or approved projects, taking into account any existing environmental problems relating to areas of particular environmental importance likely to be affected or the use of natural resources;	All Volume 2 technical chapters (chapters 7 to 21) and Volume 2 – Chapter 22: Cumulative Effects.

Specified Information		Location within the ES
f)	The impact of the project on climate (for example the nature and magnitude of greenhouse gas emissions) and the vulnerability of the project to climate change;	Volume 2 – Chapter 9: Climate Vulnerability and Volume 2 – Chapter 10: Effects on Climate.
g)	The technologies and the substances used.	Volume 2 – Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant) and Volume 3 – Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
5. cont.	The description of the likely significant effects on the factors specified in regulation 4(2) should cover the direct effects and any indirect, secondary, cumulative, transboundary, short-term, medium-term and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects of the development. This description should take into account the environmental protection objectives established at Union or Member State level which are relevant to the project, including in particular those established under Council Directive 92/43/EEC[1] and Directive 2009/147/EC[2].	Volume 2 – Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant) and Volume 3 – Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
6.	A description of the forecasting methods or evidence, used to identify and assess the significant effects on the environment, including details of difficulties (for example technical deficiencies or lack of knowledge) encountered compiling the required information and the main uncertainties involved.	Volume 2 – Chapter 4: EIA Approach and Methodology, Volume 2 –Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant) and Volume 3 – Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
7.	A description of the measures envisaged to avoid, prevent, reduce or, if possible, offset any identified significant adverse effects on the environment and, where appropriate, of any proposed monitoring arrangements (for example the preparation of a post-project analysis). That description should explain the extent, to which significant adverse effects on the environment are avoided, prevented, reduced or offset, and should cover both the construction and operational phases.	Volume 2 – Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant) and Volume 3 – Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
8.	A description of the expected significant adverse effects of the development on the environment deriving from the vulnerability of the development to risks of major accidents and/or disasters which are relevant to the project concerned. Relevant information available and obtained through risk assessments pursuant to EU legislation such as Directive 2012/18/EU[3] of the European Parliament and of the Council or Council Directive 2009/71/Euratom[4] or UK environmental assessments may be used for this purpose provided that the requirements of this Directive are met. Where appropriate, this description	Volume 2 - Chapter 21: Major Accidents and Disasters.

[1] Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (legislation.gov.uk)

[2] Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (codified version) (legislation.gov.uk)

[3] Directive 2012/18/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2012 on the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances, amending and subsequently repealing Council Directive 96/82/EC (Text with EEA relevance) (legislation.gov.uk)

[4] Council Directive 2009/71/Euratom of 25 June 2009 establishing a Community framework for the nuclear safety of nuclear installations (legislation.gov.uk)

Specified Information		Location within the ES
	should include measures envisaged to prevent or mitigate the significant adverse effects of such events on the environment and details of the preparedness for and proposed response to such emergencies.	
9.	A non-technical summary of the information provided under paragraphs 1 to 8.	Volume 1 – Non-Technical Summary.
10.	A reference list detailing the sources used for the descriptions and assessments included in the environmental statement.	Volume 2 – Policy Context and Volume 2 – Technical Chapters 7-21 (where relevant).

1.3. Project team

1.3.1. This ES has been coordinated and lead by AtkinsRéalis, with technical input from two other consultants. Table 1-2 sets out the consultants responsible for the content within this ES. Further details on each technical team, including their qualifications and experience, can be found within each respective technical chapter of the ES.

Table 1-2 – ES project team

Discipline	Consultant
EIA Coordination	AtkinsRéalis
Air Quality	AtkinsRéalis
Biodiversity	AtkinsRéalis
Climate Vulnerability	AtkinsRéalis
Effects on Climate	AtkinsRéalis
Daylight, Sunlight, Overshadowing and Solar Glare	AtkinsRéalis and Delva Patman Redler
Ground Conditions and Contamination	AtkinsRéalis
Historic Environment	AtkinsRéalis
Human Health	AtkinsRéalis
Materials and Waste	AtkinsRéalis
Noise and Vibration	AtkinsRéalis
Socio-economics	AtkinsRéalis
Townscape and Visual	Heritage Architecture
Transport	AtkinsRéalis
Water Resources and Flood Risk	AtkinsRéalis
Wind Microclimate	AtkinsRéalis

1.4. Organisation of the Environmental Statement

1.4.1. This ES comprises five volumes, the first is a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the ES, the main text explaining the assessment is included in Volume 2, figures and technical appendixes are in separate

documents due to their size (Volume 4 and 5, respectively). Due to the relevance of this Proposed Development for the townscape area, this topic will be presented as a standalone document in Volume 3.

1.4.2. Figures and appendices have been referenced using the chapter number as prefix followed by the number of the figure/appendix within a given chapter.

1.4.3. The structure of the ES, including the chapters within Volume 2, are presented in Table 1-3.

Table 1-3 – ES structure

Volume		Description
Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary		Concise summary of the Proposed Development, alternative designs that were considered, environmental impacts and mitigation measures.
Volume 2: Main report		Main body of the EIA with the proposed chapter headings as set out below.
Chapter	**Chapter title**	**Chapter description**
1.	Introduction	Introduction to the ES, EIA requirements, project team, organisation of the ES, details of other documents and ES availability.
2.	Description of the Site and Proposed Development	Description of the Site, planning history and proposed development.
3.	Policy context	National planning policy, local planning policy and other policy and guidance considerations.
4.	EIA approach and methodology	Overview of legislation and guidance, screening, scoping and consultation, non-significant effects, approach to technical assessments, structure of technical chapters, assessment and evaluation of significant effects, baseline conditions, mitigation, residual and cumulative effects, assumptions and limitations and objectivity.
5.	Alternatives considered and design evolution	Consideration of do nothing alternative, alternative locations, uses for the Site and alternative designs.
6.	Construction phasing and methodology	Overview of construction programme, methodology and impacts.
7.	Air quality	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on air quality.
8.	Biodiversity	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on biodiversity.
9.	Climate vulnerability	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on climate vulnerability.
10.	Effects on climate	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on climate change.
11.	Daylight, sunlight, overshadowing and solar glare	Assessment of the effects on daylight, sunlight, overshadowing and solar glare to adjacent receptors.
12.	Ground conditions and contamination	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on ground conditions and contamination.
13.	Historic environment	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on the historic environment including built heritage archaeology.

Volume		Description
14.	Human health	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on human health.
15.	Materials and waste	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on material use and waste.
16.	Noise and vibration	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on noise and vibration.
17.	Socio-economics	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on socio-economic receptors.
18.	Transport	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on transport.
19.	Water resources and flood risk	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on water resources and flood risk.
20.	Wind microclimate	Assessment of effects on the microclimate in terms of wind.
21.	Major accidents and disasters	Assesses the effects the Proposed Development may have on potential major accidents or disasters.
22.	Cumulative effects	Assessment of cumulative effects with other developments.
23.	Summary	Summary of the effects that remain following mitigation.
Volume 3: Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment		The methodology and findings of the TVIA accompanied by a full set of views and verified images.
Volume 4: Technical appendices		These will provide supplementary details of the environmental assessments conducted during the EIA including relevant data, tables and photographs.
Volume 5: Figures		These will include all relevant plans and drawings necessary to support the environmental assessments.

1.5. Environmental Statement availability

1.5.1. This ES is available for public viewing at MCC during normal office hours, Manchester City Council, Town Hall Extension Albert Square Manchester M60 2LA. This ES is also available for public viewing on the MCC planning portal at the following address: http://pa.manchester.gov.uk/online-applications/.

1.5.2. Copies of this ES and other associated documents are available to purchase (subject to availability) either as hard or digital copies from AtkinsRéalis Limited, The Exchange, 3 New York Street. Manchester M1 4HN. Further details, such as pricing, are available on request.

2. Description of the Site and Proposed Development

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. This chapter provides a description of the Proposed Development and Site, its surrounding area and key environmental constraints.

2.1.2. This chapter is supported by figures contained within ES Volume 5:

- ES (Volume 4) Appendix 2.1 Planning drawing pack
- ES (Volume 5) Figure 2.1 Environmental constraints map.

2.2. Site description

2.2.1. The former Central Retail Park is approximately 4ha in total. The Proposed Development Site area is approximately 2.87 ha and is centred on NGR SJ 85031 98455.

2.2.2. The 'Site' refers to the EIA boundary (which includes the Phase 1 development and the new ground levels for the proposed park) within the former Central Retail Park in New Islington in Greater Manchester.

2.2.3. The Site forms the western portion (Phase 1) of the FCRP Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) area bounded by Great Ancoats Street to the south, Old Mill Street to the east, Hugh Oldham Way to the north and the Rochdale Canal to the west.

2.2.4. The Site currently comprises vacant brownfield land with a disused hardstanding carpark with other hardstanding areas. Existing trees line the edge of the Site and patches of shrub and grass vegetation are scattered across the Site. There is a significant level change across the Site between its northwest corner, descending towards its southeast corner where Great Ancoats Street and Old Mill Street intersect.

2.2.5. Currently, the Site has a main vehicular access point located off Great Ancoats Street and a secondary access point via Old Mill Street, formerly used for deliveries and waste collections.

Surrounding area

2.2.6. The Proposed Development is located in New Islington, Greater Manchester. The location of the Proposed Development Site in its wider geographical context is shown in ES (Volume 5) Figure 2.1.

2.2.7. New Islington has witnessed significant investment and regeneration over the last 20 years. It is characterised as a residential-led neighbourhood with a wide range of supporting commercial and amenity offerings.

2.2.8. The Site is bound by the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School and associated playground and Cotton Field Park to the north, the Rochdale Canal to the west, beyond which lie a number of commercial and residential buildings (including listed mill buildings in the Ancoats Conservation Area) along Redhill Street. Opposite the Site, to the south of Great Ancoats Street, a number of businesses are located at the Urban Exchange, a retail outlet as well as residential buildings including those in the

Brownsfield Grade II* Listed Mill and serviced apartments on Laystall Street. There is also high-density residential accommodation within the surrounding area including to the west of the Site along Old Mill Street.

2.2.9. Great Ancoats Street, the inner-city ring road, runs along the southern boundary of the Site. The area beyond is characteristic of its City Centre location, providing a range of uses including retail and leisure, residential, commercial and hotels in addition to areas of surface car parking and industrial uses.

2.2.10. Phase 2 of the FCRP SRF forms the area to the immediate east of the Site, separating it from Old Mill Street. A number of residential apartments line Old Mill Street and rise up to 16 storeys in height. The New Islington Medical Practice occupies a plot outside of the northeastern extent of the SRF site adjacent to New Islington Marina and Cotton Field Park. Beyond Old Mill Street to the east, residential uses separate the SRF site from the Ashton Canal and the New Islington Metrolink stop.

2.2.11. Although the Site is not located within the Ancoats Conservation Area, the boundary of the Conservation Area runs adjacent to the Site along the banks of the Rochdale Canal. There are six other conservation areas within 1 km of the Proposed Development Site.

2.2.12. There are no statutory Listed Buildings within the Proposed Development Site, however there are 247 Listed Buildings within 1 km, the closest being Grade II Rochdale Canal Lock Number 82 (ID: 1247485) located 2 m.

2.2.13. The Proposed Development Site is located within the Manchester Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), which covers Manchester City Centre, the area around Manchester Airport and the main arterial traffic routes in the city. The pollutant declared for the AQMA is annual mean nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) with the source determined as a mixture of road types.

2.2.14. The Rochdale Canal is the closest waterbody to the Proposed Development Site, located adjacent to the western boundary of the Site. The Proposed Development Site is within Flood Zone 1 (low probability of flooding).

2.2.15. There are nine Noise Important Areas (NIA) within 1 km of the Proposed Development, the closest is NIA (ID: 10962) which extends over the Site associated with Great Ancoats Street.

2.2.16. There are two non-statutory designated sites for their ecological value within 1 km of the Proposed Development Site:

- Rochdale Canal Stott's Lane – Ducie Street Basin Site of Biological Importance (SBI) adjacent to the western boundary of the Proposed Development Site; and
- Ashton Canal (West) SBI located 175 m east of the Proposed Development Site.

2.2.17. There are no statutory designated sites for their ecological value within 2 km of the Proposed Development Site. The closest is Rochdale Canal Special Area of Conservation (SAC) located 4.7 km north-east of the Proposed Development Site.

2.2.18. There are no historic landfills or permitted waste sites within 300 m of the Proposed Development Site. The closest is historic landfill (ID: EAHLD16530) located 760 m south-east of the Proposed Development Site.

2.3. Proposed Development

2.3.1. The Proposed Development comprises:

- A package of enabling works including the establishment of new site levels (including for the future Park development being brought forward by MCC under a concurrent separate application) and permanent boundaries, removal of services, highways alterations and other associated works; and,
- The development of a new civil service office campus including:
  - North Building comprising basement, ground plus seven floors of offices, plus enclosed and exposed rooftop plant up to 92.950 AOD;
  - South Building comprising basement, ground floor commercial uses, cycle parking, and occupiable office floorspace, plus six floors of offices plus enclosed and exposed rooftop plant up to Level 90.100 AOD;
  - Basement level accessible car parking of 50 spaces, (including 15 electrical vehicles (EV) charging points) with access via Great Ancoats Street plus 5 additional spaces associated with facilities management and operations;
  - The creation of new areas of public realm, including improved frontage to Great Ancoats Street, a Canal Plaza adjacent to the Rochdale Canal, and a new boulevard between the two buildings.
  - An area of private landscaping adjacent to the North Building enclosed by a boundary wall and a private garden adjacent to the east elevation of the South Building; and
  - Associated servicing and access arrangements.

2.3.2. The term 'Proposed Development' used throughout the ES refers to all stages of the project, including construction and operation for both phases. For construction phasing and methodology please see ES (Volume 2) Chapter 6.

2.3.3. Table 2-1 lists key development information of the Proposed Development.

Table 2-1 – Proposed Development details

Term	Amount
Site area (ha)	2.87
North and South buildings	
Building heights	North Building: Ground plus seven floors plus enclosed and exposed rooftop plant up to 92.950 AOD South Building: Ground plus six floors plus enclosed and exposed rooftop plant up to 90.100 AOD.
Office floorspace (Use class Egi)	83,000 m^2
Ground floor commercial floorspace (Use class E)	1,000 m^2
Total floorspace	84,000 m^2 - Gross internal area (GIA) 87,000 m^2 – Gross external area (GEA)
Public Realm and landscaping	▪
Car parking spaces	50 (All accessible), plus 5 associated with FM and operations
Cycle parking spaces	320

Access arrangements	Primary vehicular access to the basement for parking and servicing is from Great Ancoats Street. Emergency vehicle access is permitted via Hugh Oldham Way, connecting to Old Mill Street.
Park levels	
Finished Site levels	Varies with typical ground level datum at +50.50. See ES (Volume 4) Appendix 2.1 Planning Drawing Pack: Proposed Topographical Plan and Park Sections

Layout

2.3.4. The Site Layout Plan for Manchester Digital Campus includes public realm and landscape designs that have sought to balance the design aspirations for the Proposed Development with the technical requirements required for the Campus to operate and function efficiently (see Figure 2-1). The Site layout has also considered GPA's security requirements as a government building.

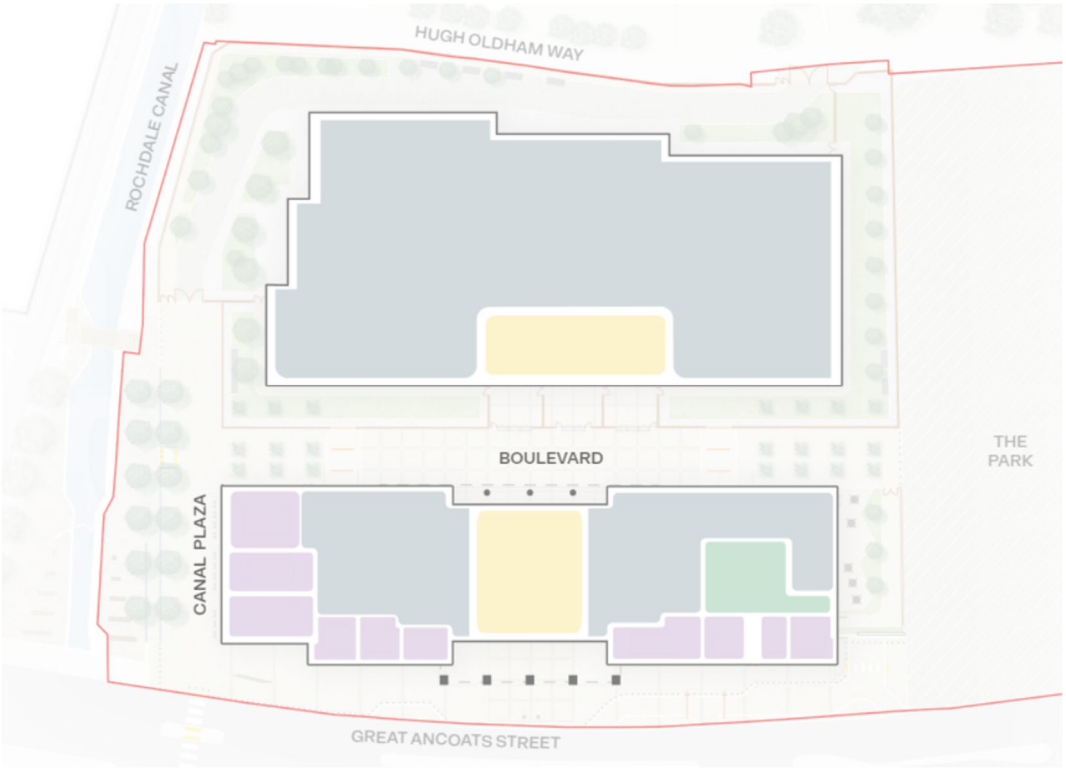


Figure 2-1 – Site Layout for Manchester Digital Campus

2.3.5. The Proposed Development will utilise the existing Site levels to provide an underground area including an accessible parking within a shared basement carpark located between the two buildings. This is accessed via a vehicle entrance and ramp from Great Ancoats Street down into the Site. This basement carpark also provides other functional benefits relating to the operation and management of the campus including accessible car parking, deliveries, maintenance access, and refuse storage.

2.3.6. The external spaces around the buildings include public realm and landscape areas, including:

- A pedestrian area at the centre of the Site which includes the entrance to both buildings. This will be known as the 'Boulevard'.

- A canal-side plaza at the north-west corner of the Site, providing a space for pedestrians and office staff to use. This space will provide a new publicly accessible amenity space that benefits from the adjacency of the Rochdale Canal and the new retail offering and enables a new outlook of the historic mills on Redhill Street opposite.
- A new street-scape along the edge of Great Ancoats Street with hard landscape and trees.
- A private landscaped area surrounding the North Building predominantly featuring planting and trees.
- A small private terrace area adjacent to the South Building enabling access to the campus cycle parking provision.

Scale and massing

2.3.7. The buildings have a consistent simple rectangular silhouette and materials to ensure consistency across the campus, however each building has a different architecture, as shown in ES (Volume 4) Appendix 2.1: Contextual elevations drawings (MDCX-ATR-ZZ-ZZ-DR-A-012020, MDCX-ATR-ZZ-ZZ-DR-A-012021, MDCX-ATR-ZZ-ZZ-DR-A-012022)

2.3.8. The buildings have been designed to respond to the surrounding context as outlined below

- The massing and proposed materials of the buildings have been designed in accordance with the FCRP Strategic Regeneration Framework ensuring compatibility with neighbours including Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School to the north and Ancoats Conservation Area to the west.
- The building footprints step inward towards the centre of the Site to maintain a respectful distance from the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School to the north and the Ancoats Conservation Area to the west.
- The Boulevard space runs east-west through the Site enabling permeability through the Site and provides a shared, protected arrival sequence and entrances for North and South buildings.
- The South Building footprint steps outward towards Great Ancoats Street to the south following the profile of the road and sets up a new prominent streetscape that also provides the retail outlets on the ground floor with a hard landscaped pedestrian street edge.

Appearance and proposed materials

North Building

2.3.9. The North Building will occupy the northern part of the Site, see Figure 2-2.

2.3.10. The North Building is placed furthest away from the main roads with its own external spaces which are not publicly accessible. It will be accessed via three main entrances grouped together on the pedestrian Boulevard on the southwest side of the building.

2.3.11. The massing and of the North Building has been developed to be as sensitive as possible to neighbouring buildings including the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School to the north and historic mill buildings to the west. Design features such as the fins also minimise the direct views over the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School and historic mill buildings.

2.3.12. The prominent silhouette of the building sits at nine storeys which is in unison with the South Building. Proposed materials will be consistent with the South Building, using concrete or reconstituted stone elements with vertical proportions, however the architectural expression has been designed to be distinctive from the South Building.

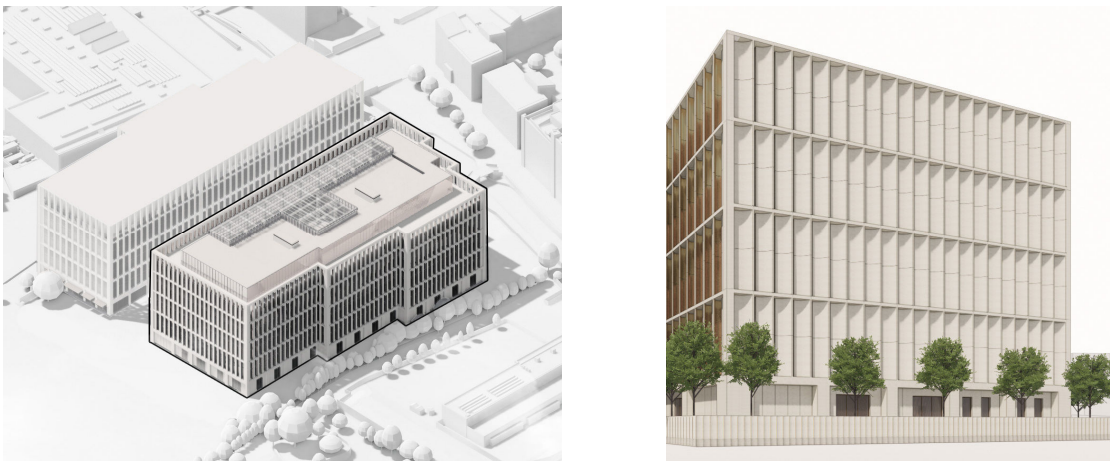


Figure 2-2 – North Building viewed form the north (left) and proposed materials viewed from the east (right).

South Building

2.3.13. The South Building will occupy the southern part of the Site, see Figure 2-3. It will be a GPA hub building housing several government departments.

2.3.14. The building provides an active frontage to Great Ancoats Street, with retail spaces complementing the workspace functions and providing amenity to staff and the public. It will be accessed via the main entrance located on the pedestrian Boulevard on the northern side leading into the central atrium space in the centre of the building. A second entrance is available from Great Ancoats Street also leading into this central atrium space.

2.3.15. The massing has been developed to respond to the size and ratio of footprint available whilst repairing the streetscape of Great Ancoats Street. The overall silhouette of the building sits at six storeys which is in unison with the North Building.

2.3.16. Proposed materials will be consistent with the North Building, using concrete or reconstituted stone elements with vertical proportions.

2.3.17. The building also contains a GPA regional Business Events Centre that can be used by staff of the Digital Campus buildings as well as other civil servants.



Figure 2-3 – South Building from Great Ancoats Street (left) and from the Park boundary to the east (right).

Landscaping strategy

2.3.18. The Proposed Development will connect to the surrounding area and land uses, building upon existing amenities of Cotton Field Park, New Islington Marina and the Rochdale Canal.

2.3.19. The proposed landscaping will provide a number of key functional aspects including:

- Access and movement for pedestrians, cyclists and all vehicular and emergency / delivery scenarios.
- Compliance with MCC policy and a role in contributing to the city as a vibrant new civic destination.
- Respect for its neighbours which include the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School and Ancoats Conservation Area as well as a number of surrounding residential buildings which overlook it.
- Deliver drainage solutions aiding climate resilience.

2.3.20. The Proposed Development includes five key public realm spaces within the wider Site masterplan, associated with the two buildings as shown in Figure 2-4 and ES (Volume 4) Appendix 2.1: Landscape / Public Ream Masterplan:

- North Building landscape
- The Boulevard
- Canal Plaza
- Great Ancoats Street Frontage
- The Terrace

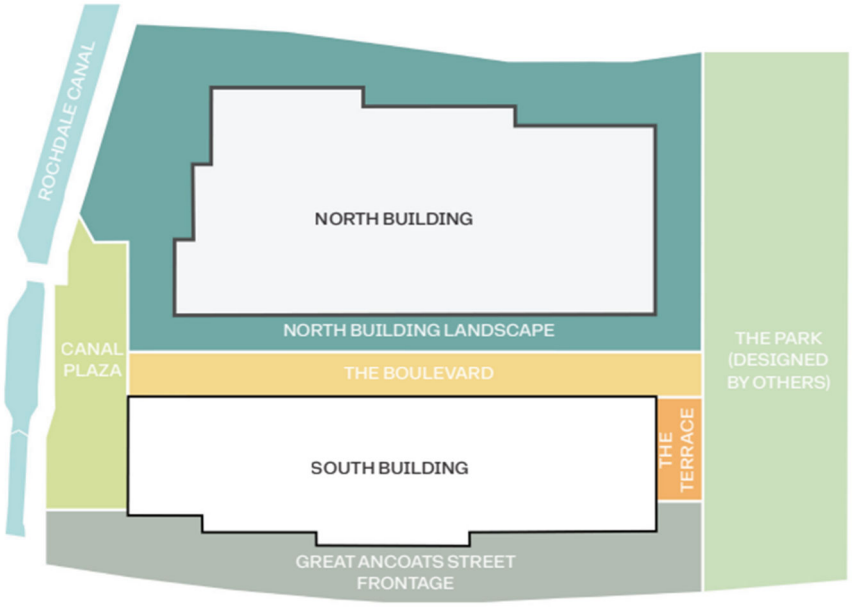


Figure 2-4 – Public realm spaces associated with the Proposed Development

North Building landscape

2.3.21. North Building is designed within an island site which has been created by a boundary wall wrapping around the building.

2.3.22. The north side faces onto a sensitive boundary adjacent to the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School requiring the design solution to help reduce visual impacts as well as meet the requirements of the GPA including security, and emergency and maintenance access. The solution is a boundary wall of 3.0m on the Boulevard, rising to 3.6 metres on the other three sides and to the school including fencing on top to match the existing height of the school boundary. This boundary wall will include artwork in prominent locations to provide visual interest, for example, artwork appealing to children on the school boundary. A green grid pavement will allow for heavy axle vehicle movements for fire and maintenance access.

2.3.23. The western side also has a sensitive boundary facing the Ancoats Conservation Area and a unique canal facing frontage. The building is set back from the conservation area allowing space for a planted garden behind a boundary wall with access to the towpath in front. The boundary wall will have artwork designed to reflect the historic context of the Rochdale Canal and the Ancoats Conservation Area. The emergency and maintenance access pavement continues through this area to a gated exit.

2.3.24. The park boundary on the eastern side of the North Building comprises of a tree planted space bounded by a boundary wall with hard paved access for maintenance. The boundary wall will have artwork designed to reflect the history of the Site and the proposals for the new adjacent green space (separate application).

The Boulevard

2.3.25. This will be a formal hard paved area with a small grid of trees at each end. A grid of lights will also be a feature in this space. The Boulevard will cater for large scale pedestrian movement to the key building entrances and also cycles that will access the South Building via The Terrace on the eastern side of the Site.

2.3.26. Throughout this space there will be designs incorporated into the floor and the boundary wall that will celebrate a 'digital theme' in line with the concept for this space.

Canal Plaza

2.3.27. This space forms a key interface between the Ancoats Conservation Area and the development. The design aims to mirror the treatment on the Redhill Street side of the canal with large tree planting within an area of hard surfacing and abundant seating, capitalising on a sunny west facing position. A large, paved area caters for the expected movement of pedestrians through this space coming from the canal towpath, Great Ancoats Street and the Henry Street bridge crossing. This pavement will also allow escape for Fire Engine and emergency scenarios onto Great Ancoats Street via a series of drop bollards.

Great Ancoats Street Frontage

2.3.28. The form of the South Building will help to activate the frontage along Great Ancoats Street extending the building in an easterly direction and providing an extended retailed frontage. This will be fronted by pavement which will incorporate protective measures in the form of a line of bollards. The eastern end of this space will also provide a pull-in layby off Great Ancoats Street for delivery and access to the basement car park of the Site.

The Terrace

2.3.29. This space occupies the space at the eastern end of South Building and will overlook the Park. It will provide space for cycle arrivals into building plus a planted private garden space. The space will be protected by a boundary fence as there will be a change in level at this location.

3. Policy context

3.1. Introduction

3.1.1. This chapter includes an overview of national and local planning policies, as well as other policies and guidance considerations. Other supporting planning policy or guidance which are relevant to specific disciplines are referred to within the relevant technical chapters.

3.2. National planning policy

3.2.1. The ES has had regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government's economic, environmental, and social planning policies for England. The policies contained within the NPPF articulate the Government's vision of sustainable development, which are intended to be interpreted at a local level, to meet the requirements of local aspirations.

3.2.2. The NPPF should be read alongside the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), which aims to make planning guidance more accessible, and to ensure that the guidance is kept up to date.

3.2.3. The ES has had regard to the most recent revision of the NPPF, published in December 2023.

3.3. Local planning policy

3.3.1. Manchester City Council's (MCC) Development Plan currently comprises:

- Manchester City Council Core Strategy 2012 – 2027 ("the Core Strategy")[5];
- Places for Everyone (March 2024)[6]
- Manchester Proposals Map (2012)[7];
- Saved Policies of the Manchester Unitary Development Plan 2005 ("the UDP")[8];
- Greater Manchester Joint Waste Development Plan Document (2012)[9];Manchester
- Greater Manchester Joint Minerals Plan (2013)[10];

3.3.2. Additionally, the ES considered the following documents:

- Former Central Retail Park Strategic Regeneration Framework (March 2023)[11];
- Guide to Development in Manchester – Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance (SPD)[12];
- Our Manchester Strategy 2016-2025[13];
- Stronger Together: Greater Manchester Strategy (2013)[14];
- Manchester City Centre Strategic Plan (2015-2018)[15];
- Manchester's Climate Change Action Plan 2020-2025[16];
- The Manchester Climate Change Partnership Framework 2022 Update (2020-2025)[17];
- Greater Manchester's Five-year Environment Plan (2019)[18];
- City Centre Transport Strategy (2021)[19];
- Greater Manchester Strategy 2021-2031[20];
- Ancoats, Bradford and Clayton Integrated Neighbourhood Team Plan 2021 – 2022[21];
- Ancoats and New Islington Neighbourhood Development Framework 2016[22];
- East Manchester Strategic Regeneration Framework 2008-2018[23].

[5] Core Strategy 2012-2027 | Core Strategy 2012-2027 | Manchester City Council

[6] Places for Everyone | Places for Everyone | Manchester City Council

[7] Local Development Framework Area Map Browser (arcgis.com)

[8] About the Unitary Development Plan | Unitary Development Plan (UDP) | Manchester City Council

[9] Greater Manchester Joint Waste Development Plan Documents | Manchester City Council

[10] Greater Manchester Joint Minerals Development Plan Documents | Manchester City Council

[11] Former Central Retail Park framework | Manchester City Council

[12] Guide to Development in Manchester - Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance (SPD) | The Guide to Development in Manchester | Manchester City Council

[13] Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025 | Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025 | Manchester City Council

[14] gm_strategy_stronger_together.pdf (greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

[15] City Centre Strategic Plan 2015 - 2018 | Manchester City Council

[16] Final MCC Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25.pdf (manchester.gov.uk)

[17] https://www.manchesterclimate.com/2022-update-to-the-framework

[18] 5-year-plan-branded_3.pdf (greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

[19] Transport Strategy for Manchester City Centre | Manchester City Council

[20] The Greater Manchester Strategy 2021-2031 (aboutgreatermanchester.com)

[21] Ancoats, Bradford and Clayton POAP (manchesterlco.org)

[22] Ancoats and New Islington | Manchester City Council

[23] Eastlands Regeneration Framework July 2011 - As presented to the Executive 13 July 2011 (manchester.gov.uk)

4. EIA approach and methodology

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. This chapter sets out the methodology used to prepare each chapter of the ES and describes its structure and content.

4.2. Scoping and consultation

4.2.1. An EIA Scoping Opinion Request was issued to MCC on 30th September 2024. The EIA Scoping Opinion Request concluded that all topics would be scoped into the EIA except for aviation and electronic interface. A formal Scoping Opinion was received on November 2024, which is provided in ES (Volume 4) Appendix 4.2 alongside responses to each comment in the Scoping Opinion.

Additional consultation

4.2.2. Further to the EIA Scoping Opinion Request, additional consultation and engagement with statutory and non-statutory stakeholders including the public has been ongoing throughout the design development. This has included public consultation and meetings with key stakeholders.

4.2.3. Consultation and engagement have included the following:

- Extensive pre-application engagement was undertaken with MCC which included weekly meetings to discuss and agree the key principals and design of the Proposed Development.
- Regular meetings with MCC Highways.
- Discussions with Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service to discuss and agree the requirements for the programme of archaeological fieldwork.
- Three meetings were held in January, May and November 2024 with Historic England to discuss the proposals and design development.
- Six meetings have been held with the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School.
- Three meetings have been held with New Islington Medical Practice
- A two-week formal public consultation period was held in September 2024. The purpose of this exercise was to invite comments from residents and stakeholders to help inform the final application.

4.2.4. Further details of the public consultation and exhibition events are provided within the Statement of Community Involvement submitted in support of the Application.

4.3. Approach to technical assessments

4.3.1. The approach to technical assessments includes establishing the baseline for each topic, including identifying receptors, classifying their sensitivity to then identify potential impacts of the Proposed Development on these receptors, which are then assessed for the construction and operation phases.

4.3.2. Embedded mitigation (elements included in the design) will be considered in the assessment of potential effects and additional mitigation measures will be considered, as appropriate. This methodology allows for the identification of the likely significant residual effects.

4.3.3. The EIA commenced at an early stage in the development and design process of the Proposed Development with the goal of informing design and avoiding impacts where possible. The assessments were based on the descriptions of the Proposed Development summarised in section 2.3 above and

have been undertaken in accordance with current best practice. Specific guidance used is referenced within each of the respective technical chapters.

4.3.4. The assessments carried out in this ES involved consultation with statutory and non-statutory bodies, desk-based research, Site inspections and surveys, impact and effect prediction and identification of mitigation measures. This is described in detail in each of the technical assessments (ES Chapters 7-20, Volume 2).

4.4. Structure of technical chapters

4.4.1. Each technical chapter of the ES has been set out in line with Table 4-1.

Table 4-1 – Structure of ES technical chapters

Chapter structure	Description
Executive summary	Each technical chapter begins with an executive summary, outlining key issues, effects on the affected groups, effects on environmental resources, beneficial effects of the Proposed Development and mitigation in place to address these effects.
Introduction	Each technical chapter has an introduction providing context to the EIA completed.
Competent expert evidence	Evidence competent expertise by outlining the authors education, professional memberships with relevant organisations and professional experience.
Relevant legislation and guidance	Summary of legislation, national, regional, and local policies and technical guidance of relevance to the environmental discipline, assessment, the Site and Proposed Development.
Assessment methodology	Overview of the methodology used to conduct the assessment, including assumptions and limitations and any consultations taken place.
Baseline conditions	Description of environmental impacts in terms of the extent of likely change to the baseline environment.
Potential impacts	Description of potential impacts as a result of the Proposed Development.
Assessment of effects	Overview embedded mitigation and of the likely significant environmental effects (beneficial and adverse) resulting from the Proposed Development, during construction and operation.
Additional mitigation and enhancement measures	Overview of additional mitigation measures introduced for construction and operational stages measures, where adverse environmental impacts remain following the culmination of the design process.
Residual effects	Description of the residual effects (significant and non-significant) during construction and operation, resulting from the Proposed Development after mitigation measures have been implemented.
Cumulative effects	List of topic-specific cumulative effects.
Summary and conclusions	Summary of the main conclusions of the assessment undertaken.

4.5. EIA and evaluation of significant effects

4.5.1. The EIA identifies the impacts relevant to each of the environmental aspects, the affected receptors, and assesses the significance of the impacts. Where relevant these impacts include indirect and downstream impact in line with R. (on the application of Finch) v Surrey CC [2024] UKSC 20.

4.5.2. The significance of the impacts depends on the sensitivity of the receptors and the magnitude of the impacts. The more sensitive a receptor is to an impact, the more significant the effect is likely to be. The more severe the impact, the more significant the effect is likely to be.

4.5.3. The potential impacts likely to arise from the construction and operation of the Proposed Development have been determined based on the following criteria.

Magnitude

4.5.4. The magnitude of the impact is described on a four-point scale: Major / Moderate / Minor / Negligible. The higher the magnitude of the impact, the more likely the resulting effect would be significant. Table 4-2 details the criteria used for defining magnitude.

4.5.5. The magnitude of the impacts is defined for each environmental topic depending on the specific characteristics of the impact factors and may be qualitative or refer to specific parameters and thresholds.

Table 4-2 – Magnitude of impact criteria

Magnitude of impact		Typical criteria description
Major	Adverse	Loss of resource and/or quality and integrity
	Beneficial	Large scale or major improvement of resource quality; extensive restoration; major improvement of attribute quality.
Moderate	Adverse	Loss of resource, but not adversely affecting the integrity; partial loss of/damage to key characteristics, features or elements.
	Beneficial	Benefit to, or addition of, key characteristics, features or elements; improvement of attribute quality.
Minor	Adverse	Some measurable change in attributes or reduction in quality; minor loss of, or alteration to, one (maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements.
	Beneficial	Minor benefit to, or addition of, one (maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements; some beneficial impact on attribute or a reduced risk of negative impact occurring.
Negligible	Adverse	Very minor loss or detrimental alteration to one or more characteristics, features or elements.
	Beneficial	Very minor benefit to or positive addition to one or more characteristics, features or elements.
No change		No loss or alteration of characteristics, features or elements; no observable impact in either direction.

Sensitivity

4.5.6. Sensitivity or value of a receptor is determined by its importance locally, regionally and nationally, as well as its capacity to cope with change arising from the construction and/or operation of a proposed development, i.e. its sensitivity to change. The criteria for defining sensitivity may vary between environmental topics, but broadly follows the descriptions set out in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3 – Sensitivity and value criteria

Sensitivity/value	Description
High	High importance and rarity, national scale, and limited potential for replacement.
Medium	Medium or high importance and rarity, regional scale, some potential for replacement.
Low	Low or medium importance and rarity, local scale.
Negligible	Very low importance and rarity, local scale.

Significance

4.5.7. Generally, significant effects are identified by considering the combination of impact magnitude and receptor sensitivity, as shown in Table 4-4. Individual environmental topics may have differing approaches based on the guidance of different professional bodies which are specific to these said topics.

4.5.8. Significance can be adverse or beneficial and both types of effects have been considered within the assessments. The levels of the relevance of the effects are categorised as follows:

- Major (adverse / beneficial);
- Moderate (adverse / beneficial);
- Minor (adverse / beneficial); and
- Negligible / no effect.

4.5.9. Major and moderate effects are generally regarded as being significant whereas minor and negligible effects are not significant.

4.5.10. 'No Change' is not included as part of Table 4-4 as no impact means there is no effect in terms of significance.

Table 4-4 – Significance effect matrix

		Impact magnitude			
		Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
Receptor sensitivity	High	Major	Major	Moderate	Minor
	Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Minor	Negligible	Negligible
	Negligible	Minor	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

4.6. Baseline conditions

4.6.1. The baseline represents the environmental condition of a Site at the time of the assessment. Each technical chapter includes a description of environmental impacts in terms of the extent of likely change to the baseline environment a. Each technical chapter also sets out the sources and methods for obtaining baseline data including where this has been agreed with relevant statutory consultees, if relevant.

4.6.2. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to apply a 'future baseline' which considers impacts on future operational receptors or a more historic one when based on population survey data. Where this has been undertaken, this has been explained within the relevant technical chapters.

4.7. Mitigation

4.7.1. Any adverse environmental effects have been considered for mitigation at the design stage and where practicable, specific measures have been included within the relevant technical chapters.

4.7.2. Proposals for mitigation follow the hierarchy set out below:

- **Avoid** - making changes to the Proposed Developments design or location to avoid adverse effects on an environmental feature;
- **Minimise** - reduction of adverse effects through sensitive environmental treatments/design;
- **Restore** - measures taken during or after construction to repair/reinstate and return a site to the situation prior to occurrence of impacts; and
- **Compensate/offset** - where avoidance or reduction measures are not available, it may be appropriate to provide compensatory/offsetting measures. It should be noted that compensatory measures do not eliminate the original adverse effect, they merely seek to offset it with a comparable positive one.

4.7.3. Design mitigation will include compliance with legislation, industry good practice, Best Practicable Measures (BPM) and construction environmental management procedures as set out in the Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (OCEMP), ES (Volume 4) Appendix 6.1. Design features that have been adapted to reduce or prevent impacts have been described in relevant technical chapters.

4.7.4. Mitigation will include both embedded mitigation and additional mitigation, the former has been included within the project design, the latter is required to address remaining significant adverse effects.

4.7.5. In addition to mitigation measures, where applicable, enhancement/improvement measures have been considered and incorporated.

4.8. Residual effects

4.8.1. Residual impacts are those which will remain following the application of recommended mitigation measures. The likely residual effects, assuming that mitigation measures have been successfully implemented, are identified within each technical chapter.

4.8.2. Residual effects have been assessed using the same system described above, taking into account any mitigation proposals. Residual effects have been presented within each technical chapter and are summarised in ES Chapter 23.

4.9. Cumulative effects

4.9.1. The EIA Regulations specify that an ES should include *"a description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment, which should cover the direct effects and any indirect, secondary, cumulative…effects."*

4.9.2. Cumulative effects are the combined effects of several development schemes (in conjunction with the Proposed Development) which may not, on an individual basis be significant but, cumulatively, have a significant effect.

4.9.3. Two types of cumulative effects have been considered in this ES. These include intra-project effects which are the combined effects of individual topic impacts on a particular sensitive receptor, and inter-project effects which are the combined effects of different development projects on a particular receptor, alongside the Proposed Development.

4.9.4. The technical chapters of the ES detail topic-specific cumulative effects as a result of the Proposed Development and other developments in the cumulative development scenarios considered, as outlined in ES (Volume 2) Chapter 22. In addition, ES (Volume 2) Chapter 22 provides an assessment of effects and the interaction of effects.

4.10. Assumptions and limitations

4.10.1. The environmental assessment process aims to assist good decision making based on the quality of the information provided including the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Development. Due to the nature of the assessment and the prediction of effects arising from events that have yet to take place, there is an inherent level of uncertainty within the assessments. Assessments use methods that are well-established and accepted to minimise this uncertainty.

4.10.2. As with any project, the design continues to evolve as further information is obtained and the design becomes more detailed. The level of detail presented about the Site and the design within this ES is sufficient to identify and understand the main environmental issues and significant effects which could arise as a result of the Proposed Development. Where uncertainties exist, a worst-case scenario is assumed for the purposes of the EIA so that effective mitigation measures can be identified and deployed. Where a worst-case scenario has been used in the assessments, this is described in the relevant sections.

4.10.3. Specific limitations, uncertainties and assumptions relating to each of the environmental aspects are described in relevant assessment chapters.

5. Alternatives considered and design evolution

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. Regulation 18(3)d of the EIA Regulations requires the Applicant to provide an outline of the main alternatives studied and an indication of the main reasons for the choice made, considering the environmental effects. This is reinforced in Schedule 4, Paragraph 2 of the EIA Regulations which states that an ES should include:

'a description of the reasonable alternatives (for example in terms of development design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects'.

5.1.2. This chapter describes the alternatives considered, including the:

- 'Do nothing' alternative where the Proposed Development is not progressed;
- Alternative uses;
- Alternative locations for the Proposed Development; and
- Alternative designs (including size and scale) for the Proposed Development.

5.2. 'Do nothing' alternative

5.2.1. The 'do nothing' alternative reflects the evolution of the Site in the absence of the Proposed Development.

5.2.2. The Site currently comprises vacant brownfield land, which comprises hardstanding following the demolition of the FCRP that occupied the Site. Trees line the edge of the Site, mostly congregated on the southern, western and northern boundaries and patches of scrub and grass vegetation are scattered across the Site, providing little value in regards to biodiversity and local amenity.

5.2.3. A vacant and unused Site detracts from the setting of the mills and conservation area to the west and detracts from the townscape character which is characterised by mid to high density urban form. Additionally, an unused Site is more susceptible to crime or anti-social behaviour due to its reduced natural surveillance.

5.2.4. The Site is located in a strategic location of Manchester City Centre. The area has experienced rapid residential growth, including the development of the New Islington Community along the new marina and the Ashton canal corridor, to the east of Old Mill Street. The new residential-led developments in New Islington and Ancoats are coming forward in a coordinated manner under policies presented in the adopted Neighbourhood Development Framework (NDF). New Islington has become a popular destination for living with typologies ranging from townhouses to apartments, defined by award-winning architecture and public realm. There also is a thriving existing community living in the Rochdale canal basin. The community in New Islington is supported by new social infrastructure such as the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School which opened in 2016 and the medical practice, both sitting to the north of the Site.

5.2.5. MCC's aspirations are to drive economic growth through the provision of new high-quality Grade A offices to attract new businesses to Manchester. The Proposed Development would be the catalyst to realise these ambitions and deliver socio-economic benefits to the area.

5.2.6. Therefore the 'do nothing' scenario is discounted due to longstanding regeneration aspirations. The Proposed Development will better utilise the Site and deliver a range of benefits to the area and is considered a suitable use given highly accessible location, well connected to sustainable modes of transport. The Proposed Development will also be supporting environmental and social improvements on site and up to a regional scale.

5.2.7. It is considered the 'do nothing' scenario will not align with the objectives of the SRF nor will it contribute to the achievement of MCC's wider strategic objectives.

5.2.8. Fundamentally, the Proposed Development delivers on long standing development plan objectives that are further supported by other material considerations. In the "do nothing" scenario, there would be a clear missed opportunity to build on these existing strengths to deliver the social and economic benefits and catalyse future development at the FCRP (including the delivery of the Park).

5.1. Alternative uses

5.1.1. Various SRF documents have evaluated appropriate uses for the Site. Previous SRF documents from November 2015 and August 2020 considered alternative uses such as residential, leisure, and large retail, but these did not attract development interest. The decision to redevelop the Site for office use aligns with national and local planning policies, including the FCRP SRF.

5.1.2. The Proposed Development has been shaped by a longstanding strategic objectives and principles embedded in local planning policy and guidance, including the FCRP SRF (consulted on in 2022). Key considerations included:

- **Place Making**: Creating a mix of spaces, including public realm and retail facilities.
- **High Quality Development**: Ensuring high-quality architecture and urban design that responds to the local context.
- **Connectivity**: Promoting new and improved links and permeability for pedestrian and cycle routes.
- **Sustainability**: Adhering to the highest standards of sustainable design.
- **Scale and Mass**: Designing offices that decrease in height and respect the listed mills.
- **Form and Layout**: Enabling the FCRP site to be separated into two developable areas, allowing phased delivery.
- **Use**: Primarily a commercial office-led proposal focused on delivering significant new office space to meet GPA's requirements.

5.1.3. The Proposed Development has been informed by a range of factors, including GPA's requirements for a civil service office campus, the specific requirements of the building's occupier, the location, public transport connectivity, regional digital skills, MCC's strategy, and feedback from statutory and non-statutory consultees.

5.1.4. The latest SRF, from March 2023, concluded that an office-led development is the most suitable and feasible option. Therefore, the proposed development is deemed appropriate for the Site and is supported by the local planning policy framework. Consequently, no alternative uses are considered further in this ES.

5.2. Alternative locations

5.2.1. The Applicant evaluated several potential sites in Manchester for the development of the Manchester Digital Campus. The criteria for selecting the most suitable location included the amount of available space, the freehold status of the site, and the quality of public transport links to support sustainable travel.

5.2.2. The selected Site is strategically located within the City Centre, well-served by multiple sustainable transportation methods. Numerous public transport options are within a ten-minute walk from the Site, providing access to various locations throughout Greater Manchester and beyond. The Site is close to numerous key services and amenities offered by the City Centre core, which are attractive to office occupiers.

5.2.3. The Proposed Development aligns with the key principles of the FCRP SRF, which aims to create a high-quality, sustainable office district with an attractive public realm. In response to the SRF, the proposals will provide office space, high-quality and sustainable buildings, and enhanced connectivity. Additionally, the Proposed Development meets the GPA's locational requirements, being the only site in Manchester close to key transport hubs.

5.2.4. It is considered that the Proposed Development should proceed in line with the SRF, and therefore, alternative locations have been discounted.

5.3. Alternative designs

5.3.1. Previous SRF documents proposed alternative layouts for building plots and mixtures of uses that were not suitable for a government campus. The current SRF (March 2023) provides large footprint plots and focuses on office use, aligning with the GPA requirements for a campus suitable for multiple government departments with shared facilities, enabling a high degree of interoperability and access.

5.3.2. The design of the Proposed Development has evolved in consideration of the current SRF principles, occupier requirements, extensive stakeholder consultation, and technical due diligence, including environmental studies such as daylight, sunlight, and microclimate. Design iterations reviewed building heights and footprint configurations, resulting in a balanced solution that considers environmental effects and sensitive neighbours. Additional details on the design evolution can be found in ES (Volume 4) Appendix 5.1: Design and Access Statement.

5.3.3. The design of the Proposed Development meets the requirements of the GPA to provide new offices buildings in central Manchester which will in turn bring investment and socio-economic benefits to the local area.

5.3.4. A wide range of specialist consultants and other stakeholders have provided valuable input into the Proposed Development, informing the design process and assisting the team in arriving at an appropriate solution for the Site.

5.3.5. Key factors in the Applicant's brief that influenced the design include:

- Identifying the FCRP site as suitable to meet GPA requirements, with a focus on the Phase 1 portion.
- Establishing SRF principles as controlling factors in design development.
- Developing public realm spaces.
- Creating indicative building footprints and heights based on the GPA brief.
- Reviewing and consolidating GPA requirements into two unified buildings.

- Evolving plots and rebalancing massing.
- Developing architectural design in response to context and neighbours.
- Sharing design proposals with key consultees, including MCC Local Planning Authority, MCC Highways, and Historic England.
- Refining the design for wider engagement with consultees, including Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School and public consultation.
- Reviewing comments and making final amendments before planning submission.

5.3.6. The scale and massing of the proposed buildings should be viewed on a city scale. The regeneration of the Ancoats Conservation Area and the development of New Islington are successful examples of city development. The Proposed Development fills the gap left by the demolition of the former retail park.

5.3.7. The variety of heights around the Site allows flexibility in determining appropriate building heights. However, the historic mills in the Ancoats Conservation Area were key drivers. Engagement with MCC and Historic England resulted in the latest heights and stepped-back facades from the historic mills, Figure 5-1.

5.3.8. The northern façade of the North building was also stepped back from the Co-op Academy New Islington Primary School to reduce overshadowing impacts, Figure 5-1.

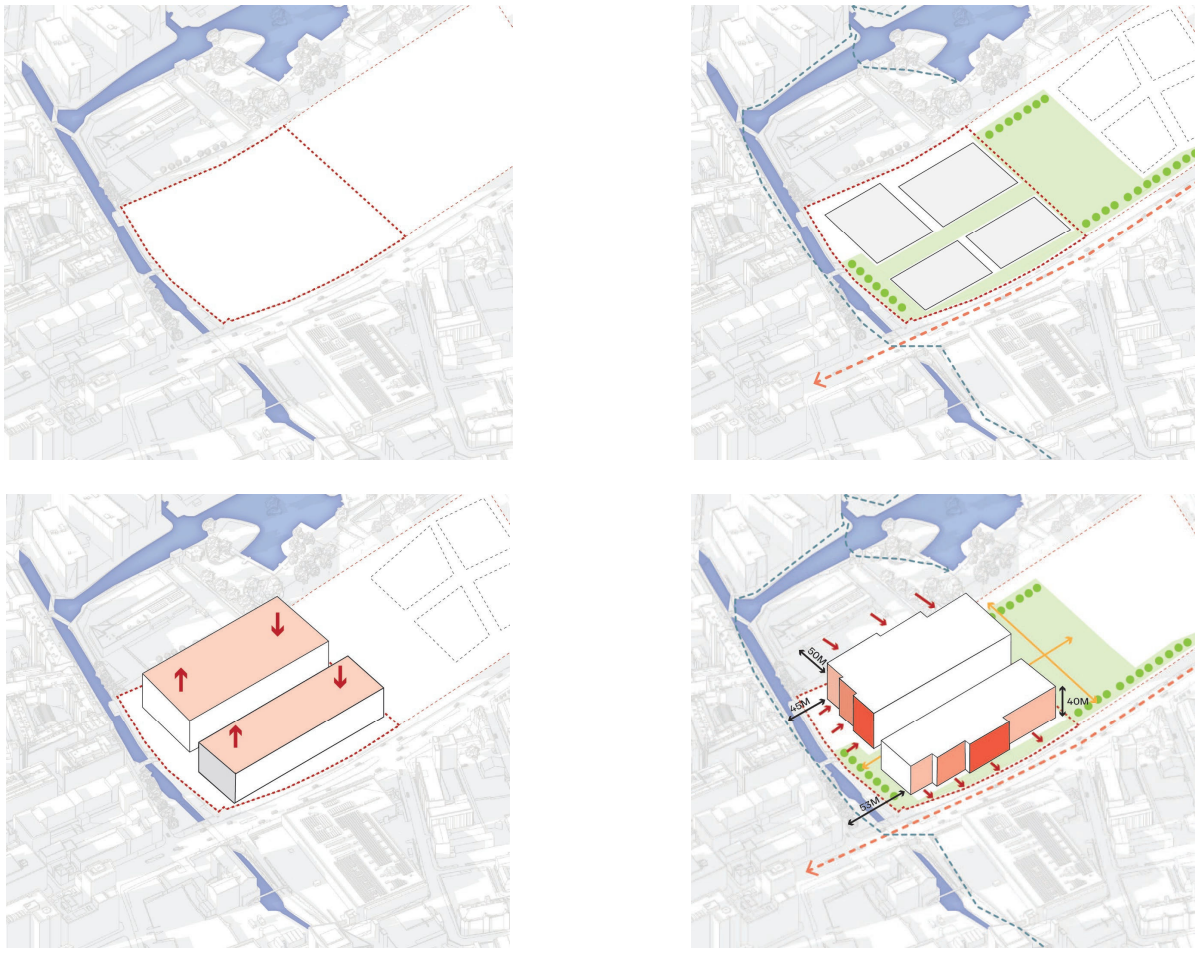


Figure 5-1 – Scale and massing evolution

5.4. Summary

5.4.1. This section outlined the main alternatives assessed for the Proposed Development, considering environmental effects as required by the EIA Regulations. The ‘do nothing’ alternative would have left the Site as a vacant brownfield with minimal biodiversity and local amenity value. This scenario would detract from the area’s character, increasing susceptibility to crime, and missing opportunities for economic growth and social benefits. Consequently, the ‘do nothing’ scenario is not aligned with strategic objectives and was therefore discounted.

5.4.2. Alternative uses for the Site were also considered, such as residential, leisure, and large retail, but these options did not attract development interest. Instead, the decision to redevelop the Site for office use aligned with national and local planning policies and supported the strategic objectives outlined in the SRF, making an office-led development the most suitable and feasible option.

5.4.3. In terms of location, the Site is strategically positioned within the City Centre, well-connected by public transport and close to key services and amenities. The Proposed Development is supported by principles of the SRF, which aimed to create a sustainable office district.

5.4.4. The current design met specific requirements and evolved through extensive stakeholder consultation and technical studies, such as microclimate and daylight and overshadowing assessments. Key considerations included public realm development, building footprints, heights, and architectural response to the local context. The final design met the Government Property Agency’s requirements, reduced environmental effects and supported socio-economic benefits for the local area.

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