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MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE.

DESIGN, ACCESS AND HERITAGE STATEMENT

FOR INSTALLATION OF PROPOSED BACK-LIT SIGNAGE

REV D

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This statement supports the application for the replacement of existing signage to the Quay Street and Byrom Street elevations of the Manchester opera house with new backlit signage.

This statement documents the key elements of the proposal in terms of design, access and heritage.

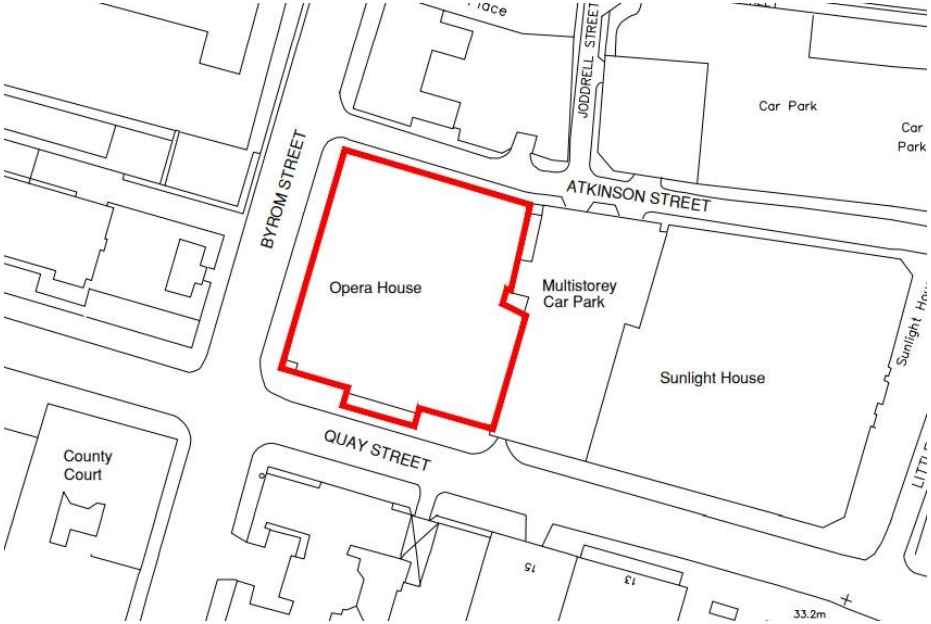
It will be used to support the application for Advertisement Consent and Listed Building Consent.

1.2 THE SITE

The site is located on Quay Street, Manchester. The frontage is more visible on the approach from the East. The recent addition of the Quay House development to the West has made the frontage less visible as the elevation of Quay house has moved further forward on the street than the previous building.

Permission has previously been granted as follows:

137808/LO/2023	19/10/2023 Listed building consent for the removal of liquid plastic waterproofing and replace with lead to top of string course and other projections.
137221/LO/2023	18/07/2023 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for redecoration of the Opera House façade.
133917/FO/2022 133918/LO/2022	01/09/2021 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT & PLANNING Proposed work to repair the rendered facade of the listed building. Introduction of a lead detail to projecting sections and inspections and localised repair of cast iron rainwater goods to Byrom Street and Quay Street elevations.
129126/LO/2021 129125/FO/2021	12/03/2021 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT & PLANNING for replacement of existing corroded steels above an existing light well wall opening and above an existing gated entrance. Installation of new concrete pavement lights on Byrom Street.
128613/LO/2020	19/02/2021 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for refurbishment of the safety curtain including the removal of the asbestos cloth, replacement pulley brackets and steel wire rope, and installation of new fire rated replacement cloth.



126635/LO/2020	06/07/2020 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT Repairs to external windows
118311/LO/2017	27/11/2017 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT Replacement of the Theatres Main Entrance Doors off the Quay Street Elevation
092689/LO/2010/C1	31/01/2013 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for works to rooftop comprising installation of 2 no. new access ladders, installation of new edge protection, re-roofing of flat and pitched roofs and retention of existing edge protection
091693/FO/2009/C1	20/04/2010 Replacement of the existing external lighting units with 16 no. lighting units, 2 to be located on the Byrom Street elevation and the remainder on the Quay Street elevation
087679/LO/2008/C1	11/09/2008 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for the installation of bird netting to 9 No. windows on front elevation

2.0 HERITAGE -

When it first opened its doors, the venue was aptly named New Theatre. The venue celebrated its opening day on Boxing Day in 1912. The venue struggled to compete with other establishments in the area, and was consequently sold to United Theatre Ltd three years after its opening. After being sold, the venue was renamed New Queens Theatre.

Between 1916 and 1920, Sir Thomas Beecham performed on several occasions. In his honour, the theatre was renamed The Opera House in 1920.

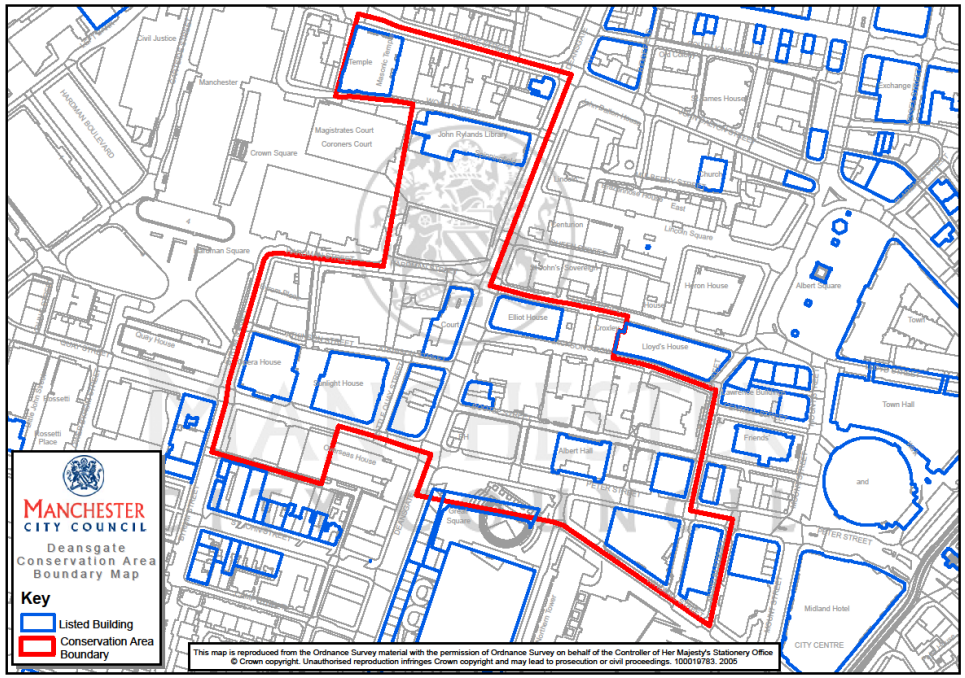
Throughout its history, the venue has adapted to the world around it. The Opera House survived the Second World War and even served as a cinema and bingo hall for some time. It wasn't until 1984 that the venue would once again operate as a theatre. Since this time, the theatre has played host to several famous shows, including Phantom of the Opera, Barnum and Oliver.

In 2003, the venue was refurbished and still continues to attract some of the best in entertainment.

The Manchester Opera House has a very large auditorium with two cantilevered balconies, each with a capacity of around 500, but because of their size they have rather restricted sight-lines to the rear. The Theatre's current capacity is 1,920. The Theatre was bought by the Ambassador Theatre Group in November 2009

The Manchester Opera House features a 15 bay facade and was designed in the Classical style. A relief of a horse-drawn carriage is situated above the central bays. An entrance canopy was added during the 20th century.

The opera house features a seating capacity of 1,920. Two cantilevered, curved balconies inside of the auditorium hold 500 seats each. The spacious stage and orchestra pit makes the theatre a great venue for musicals and orchestral performances. The theatre's stage is 37 feet wide and 42 feet deep, and the orchestra pit can hold up to 80 musicians. Although the theatre was redecorated in March of 2011, the green and gold colour scheme inside of the auditorium was preserved.



The Opera house is situated on the edge of the Deansgate conservation area.

MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE

2.1 HERITAGE - Significance

Significance

Construction as described in the listing, is of a classical style, the front block of three storeys with Attic 1:1:11:1:1 bays symmetrical, the first and last bays set back with plinth, banded rusticated stucco to all levels; giant order to first and second floors consisting of a five bay centre with engaged fluted ionic columns.

The first and fifth bays breaking forwards and each containing lettered pedestal at the foot and mask roundel at the top, flanked by three pilastered bay each side, these and the three centre bays having windows at the top with geometric glazing. There is an entablature with frieze letter “THE PLAY MIRRORS LIFE” in the centre and decorated in Wedgewood style in the other bays, dentilled cornice carried round and surmounted in the centre by a large semi-circular tympanum with allegorical relief.

There is a pedimental gable with moulded cornice on the brackets. At street level there is a five bay entrance at ground floor with canopy. The left side of the elevation is less ornate however the entablature extends to this elevation at the second floor level, forming the eaves detailing through without the Wedgewood styling. The plinth extends along the left elevation. The left elevation is divided into three bays with the first and last of banded stucco appearance, the central bay is mostly facing brick.

The inside of the theatre also holds much significance. The large auditorium has two very deep, slightly curved cantilevered balconies of approximately 500 seats each, which overhang to an excessive degree, evidence, perhaps, of the architect’s unfamiliarity with theatre design, producing poor sight-lines at the rear and a feeling of oppressiveness.

The space between the balcony fronts and the stage is architecturally impressive. It displays an assured handling of Neo-Classical motifs. Flanking each side is a stack of superimposed boxes between pairs of giant fluted Corinthian columns. The upper boxes are a later insertion, following the removal of heavily-draped canopies over the dress-circle boxes. The balcony and box fronts are formed of enriched iron balustrading. Spanning between the entablatures over the giant columns is a deep, coffered segmental arch which forms the tympanum above the high rectangular proscenium, filled by a large circular medallion flanked by winged gryphons. The immensely high main ceiling, covering the full width and depth of the auditorium, is in the form of a coffered segmental tunnel vault.

Photograph 1

The theatre is ingeniously planned to take maximum advantage of the site, with the stalls below street level and the main entrance foyer formed within the void of the first balcony - the rear wall of the auditorium thus forming the wall of the street façade.

Architectural Significance

The Theatre once held a significant position on Quay St with land to the West of the site largely vacant affording better views of the front corner and side of the theatre from this approach. The photo opposite shows the vacant plot opposite to the West of the theatre.

Some sketches of the proposed Theatre, originally to be called His Majesty's Theatre, were published in the Academy Architecture and Architectural review of 1912, both long standing publications.

There is a consistent design to the windows within the primary front elevation of the theatre overlooking quay street. The windows are casement style windows with a cross detail formed by glazing bars. These decorative windows are in contrast to the Byrom Street elevation where plain sash windows are located. The inside of the windows have a decorative bead detail whilst the external frames are simple square section. The decoration

2.1 HERITAGE - Significance

hints that the upper areas may once have been accessible to the public although the historic plans of the building do not support this.

The principal and most decorative elevation of the theatre fronts on to Quay Street and is largely unchanged from the original building save for a new link extension to the right hand side forming an access onto the main road and housing a bar area above.

Internally the plan of the building again stays true to the original although uses of spaces has been adapted in some areas and decoration has been added and updated over the years, perhaps most significantly in the entrance foyer.

Historic photos of the building show that the main façade remains largely unchanged.

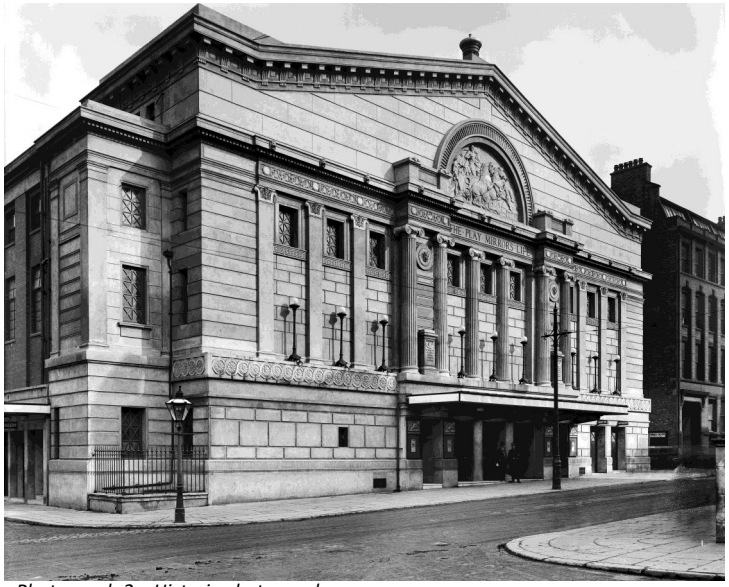
Some of the windows to the frontage have been altered particularly on the front West corner of the façade. The original decorative lights set above the canopy have also now been removed.

The Byrom Street elevation is more utilitarian in its appearance with decorative render reserved for the ground floor section only. Windows are simple non decorative sashes and walls above ground floor are finished with facing brick.

Historical Significance

The ERA reported on the opening of the New Theatre in their 4th of January 1913 edition saying:- 'After tremendous efforts to keep faith with its undertaking to open on Boxing Day, the New Theatre, Quay-street, Manchester, duly threw open its doors to the public for a matinee performance of "Kismet."

The reporting of the opening of a Manchester Theatre in the National publication shows the prominence of the building at the time of opening.



Photograph 2—Historic photograph

Photograph 3—Current façade (Google Street View)

2.2 HERITAGE - Development

Brief Summary of Architectural development

1912

The Opera House on Quay Street, Manchester was designed by Farquharson, Richardson & Gill and originally opened as the 'New Theatre' with a production of 'Kismet' on Boxing Day, the 26th of December 1912.

1915

The Theatre was renamed the New Queen's Theatre in 1915, as an homage to the former Queen's Theatres on Spring Gardens and Bridge Street.

1931

In 1931 the Theatre was bought by Howard & Wyndham Ltd, led by A. Stewart Cruikshank from its headquarters in the King's Theatre, Edinburgh.

1979

The Theatre was Manchester's main Touring House until 1979 when it closed and was converted for Bingo use but this lasted for only five years and in 1984 it was bought by the Palace Theatre Trust. During the 80’s a large scale refurbishment of the Opera House was undertaken and some of the windows to the front elevation are believed to have been replaced during this time.

2.3 HERITAGE - Listing Information.

HARVARD HOUSE

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1247470

Date first listed: 03-Oct-1974

Statutory Address: THE OPERA HOUSE, QUAY STREET

Location

Statutory Address:

THE OPERA HOUSE, QUAY STREET

District: Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)

National Grid Reference: SJ 83414 98041

Details

MANCHESTER

SJ8398 QUAY STREET 698-1/16/348 (North side) 03/10/74 The Opera House
GV II
Formerly known as: The New Theatre QUAY STREET. Theatre, now opera house. 1912, by Richardson and Gill with Farquarson; altered. Stucco on brick, slate roof. Rectangular plan at right-angles to street. Classical style. Front block of 3 storeys with attic, 1:1:11:1:1 bays, symmetrical, the first and last bays set back; with plinth, banded rusticated stucco to all levels; giant order to 1st and 2nd floors, consisting of a 5-bay centre with engaged fluted Ionic columns, the 1st and 5th bays breaking forwards and each containing a lettered pedestal at the foot and a mask roundel at the top, flanked by 3 pilastered bays each side, these and the 3 centre bays having windows at the top with geometric glazing; entablature with frieze lettered "THE PLAY MIRRORS LIFE" in the centre and decorated in Wedgwood style in the other bays, dentilled cornice carried round and surmounted in the centre by a large semi-circular tympanum with allegorical relief; pedimental gable with moulded cornice on brackets. Five-bay wide entrance at ground floor, with later C20 canopy.

MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE

3.0 HISTORIC SIGNAGE

Reviewing historical photographs of the Quay Street elevations of The Opera House, it is evident signage has existed in some for throughout the life of the building since its construction.

Photograph 2 which appears earlier in this document shows signage at the main entrance of the building. With no show signage on the canopy or above.

Later photographs, show that the first poster signs to at street level outside of the main entrance area were installed at some time between opening and April 1956, although it is difficult to ascertain from the photographs whether these were lit. V-shaped signage was also installed above the canopy by this time. Although no show signage appears on the upstand of the canopy itself, there is an 'Opera House' sign which is likely a later addition following the change of name to the building. The canopy itself also has a different appearance compared to older photographs, suggesting, replacement at some point in time before this photograph was taken. This means that the current canopy is unlikely to be original, or it has had much of its historic fabric replaced.

1988 photographs of the façade show further developments to the signage to the Quay Street elevation. It appears by this point that signage had been located in current positions. By this time show signage was added to the canopy upstand along with additional poster signs along the whole of the façade at street level, these appear to be un-lit compared to the V-shaped sign and the canopy signage which are both illuminated.

Once again in the photograph it appears that the canopy itself had been changed from the 1956 photograph suggesting further replacement or that it had undergone large alterations. This puts into question how much of the existing canopy is historic fabric as opposed to more recent additions/ alterations.

Photograph 4—Historic photograph 1956 (Arthur Lloyd)

Photograph 5—Historic photograph 1988 (Arthur Lloyd)

3.0 HISTORIC SIGNAGE

As it exists today the signage to the Quay Street elevation show little change to the 1988 photographs in terms of positions, with the exception of additional poster signs underneath the canopy around the entrances. These are however in similar positions to show posters that were evident on the earliest photographs of the building.

The signage on top of and to the face of the canopy remain a similar size to the 1988 arrangements.

The poster signs at street level are now all light-box type signs with in-built backlighting. This is as compared to the, possibly unlit signs in 1988. This is evident in photograph 7 opposite.

Photograph 6—current façade (google street view)

Photograph 7—current façade at night (manchesterhistory.net)

5.0 PROPOSALS

The proposed works will involve the removal of the existing signage to the Quay street elevations and their replacement with new LED signage displays. This includes the current 11 no. poster signs at street level (all of which currently consist of light box style poster boxes), and externally lit 'V-sign' above the canopy.

The replacement screens are as indicated on drawing 23-135-E1 and will consist of the following:

4 no. 850mm(w) x 2350mm(h) displays to be encased in protective aluminium frame with 3mm clear polycarbonate front with brightness of 600cd/m2 at daytime and 300cd/m2 at night. Frames will be painted with Ardenbrite—Antique Gold, this will match the colour of other painted external decorative elements on the building that are finished in the same colour.

2 no. 650mm(w) x 2350mm(h) display to be encased in protective aluminium frame with 3mm clear polycarbonate front with brightness of 600cd/m2 at daytime and 300cd/m2 at night. Frames will be painted with Ardenbrite—Antique Gold.

1 no. 1725mm(w) x 2350mm(h) display to be encased in protective aluminium frame with 3mm clear polycarbonate front with brightness of 600cd/m2 at daytime and 300cd/m2 at night. Frames will be painted with Ardenbrite—Antique Gold.

1 no. double sided 3000mm(w) x 2500mm(h) display sign above the existing canopy with max brightness of 600cd/m2 at daytime and 300cd/m2 at night.

All new screens will show static images, which can be updated as required to reflect changes to the Opera House's programmes. All new signs will be installed in the same position as existing signs. The proposed V-signage above the canopy will require new structure consisting of steel box sections, this is proposed to be fixed to the existing framing.

The majority of the signs will be of a similar size as the existing with the exception of the sign above the canopy which will be approximately 516mm taller than the existing sign. This would also be a change from the current 'V' shaped sign, and will instead be straight and positioned perpendicular to the elevation. This will require new fixing points into the existing wall for new framing. This will be at four points with each requiring steel end plates with four resin anchor bolts into the existing walls. The new framing and plates will be painted with Ardenbrite—Antique Gold and will match the frames of the other proposed signage displays and other painted features on the building's façade.

All new signs will be backlit LED screens and will replace signs that are either internally lit or have external lighting illuminating the signage. It is anticipated than no new electrical service connections will be required and instead the new screens will make use of the services supplying the lighting to the existing signs.

Ardenbrite—Antique Gold

Photograph—Existing painted feature

6.0 HERITAGE IMPACT

It is anticipated that the proposed removal of signage and replacement with new signage screens will have a positive overall impact on the existing historic fabric of the building, and no detrimental impact on the building as a whole. The scheme significantly reduces the signage on the building and allows more of the original recently repaired building to be seen.

The upgrading of the existing signage will aid in the day-to-day management of the Opera House. This is by allow easier updating of the information shown on the signage without the need to physically remove outdated signage and replacing with more up to date information. The reduction in manual operation required for changing posters, especially on top of the canopy reduces wear and tear on fixings and the canopy itself which in turn protects the building fabric.

As previously noted within this document, the proposed screens will replace existing signage which are all currently illuminated. The proposals therefore reduce the artificial lighting and the number of lights on the façade and will improve existing situation. The brightness of the proposed screens will not be higher than the existing lighting methods, furthermore, the brightness of the screens can be lowered if required.

The number of signages in total will also be reduced as a result of the proposals. 6 no. signs that are currently on the building's Quay Street elevation will be removed and not replaced. The proposed new signage will be located underneath the canopy and on top of the canopy.

The proposed displays above the canopy will replace signs that are not backlit however these are currently illuminated by exterior light sources, therefore the addition of backlight is not thought to be large departure from the existing and will reduce the overspill of the sign lighting.

None of the signs, to be replaced are original or have significant historical importance. The street levels signs were not part of the original building when it was first opened, with the majority having been added after 1956, as evident in historic photographs. The signs found on the canopy, likewise, are a later addition, with the canopy itself appearing to have been replaced or altered at some point in the past, and seems to be deeper than the original canopy visible in the earliest photographs of the building.

As the existing signs are lit, existing service routes can be re-used along with existing fixing points or supporting structures. This will further help to reduce the impact the proposed will have on the building. New fixings will however be required into the existing walls for the above-canopy signage.

The information on the displays will be static to reduce distraction to drivers on Quay Street and will therefore be no worse than the existing.

There will be one sign that will be slightly larger than the existing sign it replaces. This is the sign located above the canopy. This may constitute a slightly larger impact, however this is a relatively modest increase in height. Whilst the sign is taller the change in orientation of the sign to being flat rather than in a 'v' shaped arrangement means that the Quay Street elevation is significantly decluttered and the visual impact improved.

When the proposals are assessed against ICOMOS guidance on heritage impact, the proposed alterations can be classed as having an overall neutral impact on the building, this is due to there being not change to historic fabric of the building and also due to the proposed signage being of a similar size and appearance of the existing.

6.0 HERITAGE IMPACT—CONTINUED

There is currently a considerable number of advertisement signage along Quay street that are not associated with the building. The reduction of the number of signs would therefore also help to declutter the signage in the area in general. It is worth noting that existing signs around the site includes backlit displays, as well as prominent banner signage attached to lampposts. These have been indicated on drawing 23-135-SP2.

The banner signage has a vertical format, which is necessary to allow maximum visibility of the signage by pedestrians walking along the pavements. The majority of the time these signs contain information unrelated to the Opera House.

This type of signage will inevitably lead to partially blocking out parts of the Opera houses façade, depending on the position of the viewer along Quay Street. The proposed vertical, over canopy signage, will be similar in this regard however, due to its closer proximity to the building's façade, it is believed that these would have less of an impact and due to its smaller width than the existing V-signage, will block less of the building compared to the current arrangement.

The existing digital sign on Quay Street shows that digital signage is not alien to the local area. The proposed signage incorporating digital displays would therefore not appear out of place.

7.0 ACCESS

The replacement of the existing signage itself has no impact upon access and use of the building day to day, however carrying out the works to the canopy will mean the use of a scaffold and blocking off areas of the pavement to facilitate the works.

8.0 ADDENDUM A—PLANNING POLICY

The proposed alterations have been assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework, specifically the policy that applies to the proposals is section 16 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment* of the NPPF. This is due to the listed status of the Opera House and its importance as a heritage asset.

It is believed that the proposed do not contradict NPPF 16. The relevant paragraphs are as follows:

201. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

The Opera House being a Grade II listed building and due to its prominence within its area means that it has substantial heritage significance, and is an important part of its setting. The proposed works and installation of new signage is in keeping with the historic use of the building as they provide necessary show information in a similar way to the existing. The size and appearance of the proposed signage is also similar to the existing with the existing signage already being illuminated. The reduction on the amount of signage is also an improvement on the existing. It is therefore believed that there is no negative impact on the building's local setting as a result of the proposed works and instead there is an improvement.

203. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

(a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;

(b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and

(c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The proposed works include alterations to the listed building and items fixed to the heritage asset, and as the proposals are for new illuminated signage, this would have an effect on the setting of the heritage asset. As mentioned in earlier sections of this document the proposed replacement signage will be the same positions as the existing, with some sign position being removed. Although the proposed will be in the form of LED displays compared to the existing printed signs. The use of illuminated signage is consistent with the historic use of the heritage asset as a theatre building, and therefore, in this way, would not be detrimental to the building.

The digital signage would benefit the building by improving the day-to-day management and operation of the building. Whereas currently the signs need to be manually changed due to their physical nature, digital signage will not require manual access.

The existing signs are illuminated either externally or internally. This means that visually the new signage would be similar, therefore it is anticipated that there will be no impact to the local character and distinctiveness. Furthermore, the existing area has urban surroundings which currently is well lit at nighttime with high levels of ambient luminance. The area also contains other buildings which have illuminated signage. The new illuminated signage proposed would therefore not be alien to the local area and would not be considered excessive within the local street scene. The maximum level of brightness of the proposed screens will be 600cd/m2 during the day 300cd/m2 at night. This falls within the levels recommended by the Institute of Lighting Professionals in their guidance documents for urban areas.

8.0 ADDENDUM A—PLANNING POLICY CONTINUED

208. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

The alterations to the heritage asset include the removal of existing signage from Quay Street elevations of the building. The items have been demonstrated earlier in this document to have been a later addition to the building and are not thought to be historically important. This means that there is no harm to the heritage asset as a result of the removal of these.

Please refer to the Heritage impact section of this document where the proposed alterations to the building have been assessed to determine the level of impact on the heritage asset. The installation of the new displays at street level will be into the existing brickwork behind the external render finishes. Much of this existing render has been replaced or is under the process of replacement due to the previous render failing which had detrimental effects on the Heritage asset. These works were previously approved by Manchester City Council. Fixing through the render is therefore through areas of new material and not historic fabric. The fixing into the existing brickwork is also relatively minor in terms of impact. This is due to the limited number and depth of these new fixings which will not be dissimilar to the existing. The impact of this is further reduced by the fact that the brickwork has always been concealed behind render finishes, this means that visually any holes created in the brickwork would never be visible unless the render is removed. This is highly unlikely to be the case in the future as this would result in a significant change to the building appearance greatly impacting the heritage asset.

The benefits to the operation of the theatre building when compared against the limited impact means that the proposals do not contradict planning policy.