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HERITAGE STATEMENT

6A OXFORD ROAD

REVISION	-
DATE ISSUED	NOV 2024
PROJECT REF.	2060

ARCHITECTURE + HERITAGE

AMAZON HOUSE • BRAZIL STREET

MANCHESTER • M1 3PW

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Image: Photograph of site (above Nudon and Rymans stationary shop) at 6a Oxford Road, Manchester.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

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This Heritage Statement has been written to accompany a Listed Building Consent application for Unit 6a, The Dancehouse, Manchester M1 5QA.

It was produced in November 2024 by Atelier MB and its author is Laura Jessup, MA History and Theory of Architecture, PGCert. Conservation of the Historic Environment.



Image: Interior of the existing unit 6a.

2.0 LOCATION

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Image: Map showing the site (in orange).

The site is currently a restaurant (ground and mezzanine floors) at Unit 6A, The Dancehouse. There is an additional floor at second level which is currently behind a door and unused. It spans over both the restaurant and the next-door end unit (6 Oxford Road).

The building is situated towards the northern end of Oxford Road on a busy thoroughfare running south-east from Manchester city centre out towards Rusholme. It forms a block between Hulme Street and Chester Street and is opposite the Circle Square development.

3.0 DESCRIPTION + HISTORY

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The building is a block of traditional masonry construction with faience tiles to the principal elevation. In its current form it provides a parade of retail units to the basement and ground floor levels, extending in part to the first floor. The remainder of the building is in use as a theatre and dance school.

Originally designed by architects Pendleton and Dickenson, the building now known as the Dancehouse, comprised a series of street level shops sitting below two rentable hall spaces. When the original developer Emmanuel Nove (Novakovsky) went bust part-way through the project, a number of rapid changes were made to house the twin screen Regal Cinema. Construction took place between 1929 and 1930 and the architectural design referenced the popular contemporary style of Art Deco with its lavish interior details and external decoration.

The building is Grade II listed and the comprehensive description is included on the following page.



Image: Photograph of the building as Regal Cinema, 1939. Taken from Manchester Archives.



Image: Photograph of the site, 1959. Taken from Manchester Archives.

MANCHESTER , SJ8497 OXFORD ROAD 698-1/20/11127 Manchester 05-OCT-00 6-14A Dancehouse Theatre, including nos. 6-14a, GV II
Also Known As: Regal Twins, including nos. 6-14a, 6-14A, OXFORD ROAD, Manchester Former cinema, built 1929-30 by Pendleton and Dickenson of Manchester for Emmanuel Nove. Faience clad facade, with stock brick rear elevations, on steel frame; flat roof with gable ends and flat-pitched sides. Original plan of two double-height auditoria set over first-floor restaurant and waiting halls, and ground-floor foyer and shops.

EXTERIOR: Long, four-storey principal facade in classical style, clad in white faience, the ends curving into the return walls. The facade is divided into nine bays, filled with shop units at ground level, except for the central bay which forms the entrance to the theatre, with a canopy above to attract attention. At first and second floor levels the bays are separated by giant pilasters with stylised yellow faience Ionic capitals. The cornice is ornamented with miniature arches. Each bay contains six windows. All the bays, excepting the one over the entrance, have subsidiary pilasters on the first floor and consoles on the second floor to support the cornice. The windows over the entrance are separated by giant pilasters surmounted by capitals in the form of lion masks. The third floor is set back behind a balcony, which has a simple metal balustrade in the form of cross-members and verticals. The bay over the entrance rises to form an arched portico, with a volute keystone and a shaped pediment. On the top left corner of this appear the letters EN (for Emmanuel Nove) with the date, 1930, on the top right corner. The metal balustrade also continues across the bottom of the portico. The central pilasters of the quadrant ends have capitals in the form of embellished oval cartouches. The second-floor quadrant central windows have faience balustraded balconies. All the windows have six light mullion and transom glazing. The last bay on the returns is treated differently, the furthest half of each being blind and the nearest half of the left hand one only having a window at second floor level. The rear elevation has large horizontal first-floor windows and a scattering of smaller windows to light the main stairwell, hallways and lavatories. Flat roof with gable ends and flat-pitched sides. Art Deco folding metal gates at the entrance to the theatre are not original, but were added in an appropriate style in 1992.

INTERIOR: Foyer retains a little original ceiling decoration, and was refurbished in the Art Deco style in 1992, with wall decoration inspired by that elsewhere in the building. Staircase rises through the centre of the building, with a metal balustrade with rising sun and Greek fret decoration; some of this is original, more has been renewed to the same pattern. At rear an escape stair set around 1930s metal lift cage and lift. The surviving cinema auditorium is at the second and third floor levels and has much fine Art Deco plaster decoration on the walls, a little renewed. This has an undulating profile with attenuated fluted pilasters and broader ones in the form of cascades or of the zig-zag Moderne type. Flat barrel ceiling divided into fields with plaster cruciform ventilation grilles. The other cinema auditorium and the first-floor spaces (parts of which were originally a restaurant and waiting halls) have now been converted to offices and rehearsal rooms; while the wall decoration here has gone, the Art Deco cruciform plaster ventilation grilles have survived. The windows and interiors of the shops are not of special interest; the shops' significance is only as part of the formal composition of the facade.

ANALYSIS: The cinema was built as a speculative suite of halls by Emmanuel Nove, who was a housing estate developer. After his project failed, it opened as the Regal Twins (operated by the Manchester Piccadilly Picture Theatre), closing as the Cannon in 1986, to become the Dancehouse Theatre in 1992. The Regal Twins represents an early example of a multiple cinema complex, a type which only became common some forty years later with the decline in film attendances.
The exterior is a particularly handsome faience composition. Internally there is much high quality Art Deco plaster decoration to the surviving auditorium, in a surprisingly rich Art Deco idiom rare in Britain.

SOURCES: Dennis Sharp, The Picture Palace, London, Hugh Evelyn, 1969, p.211 William Shenton, unpublished gazetteer of Manchester cinemas
Listing NGR: SJ8417797373'

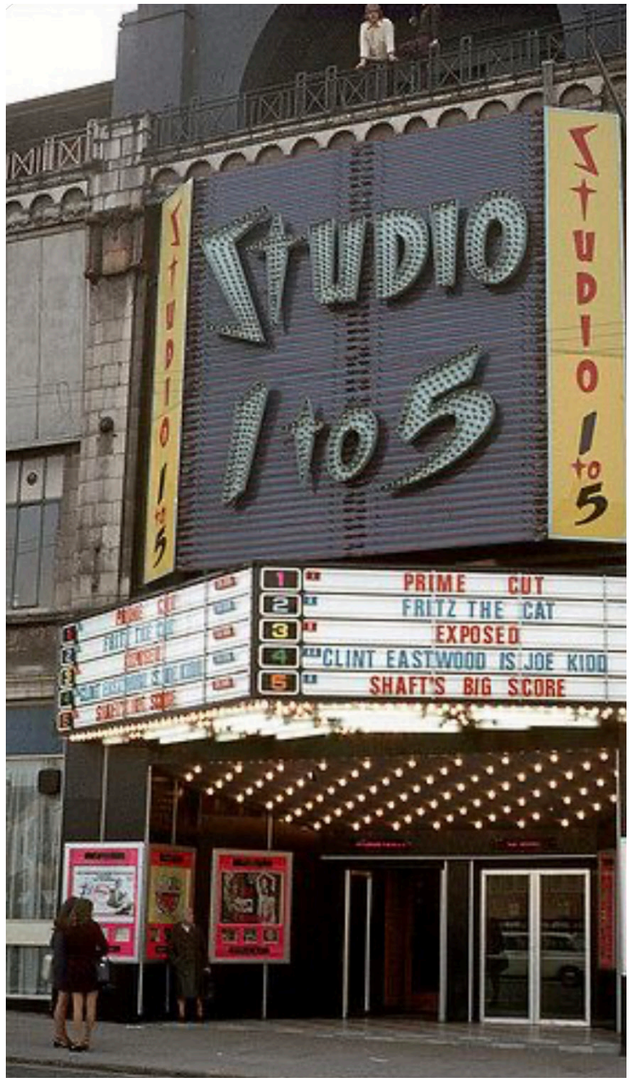


Image: Photograph from 1972.

The building continued as a popular cinema venue being renamed as 'Studio 1 and 2' in the 1960s. When screen numbers were increased to 5 in the 1970s, it formed a small multiplex 'Studio 1-5' before finally closing in 1986. After a period of vacancy, the main parts of the building were converted to house the Northern Ballet School and associated theatre space. The street level units continued in use as shops Following the development of a conservation appropriate strategy between Atelier MB and MCC, the shop units have gradually been upgraded in a series of works since 2008, with uniform glass shop fronts replacing poor quality alterations and ridding the building of an inappropriate mix of modern signage.





Images: Photographs from 2024, showing the existing upstairs space of Unit 6a.

4.0 SIGNIFICANCE

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Building

The Dancehouse has high historical and architectural significance, as demonstrated by its Grade II listing. It is a good example of its era and typology (smaller shopping units forming a parade, and larger entertainment spaces above) and is one of a limited number of Art Deco design examples in the city. The property occupies a prominent position on a busy pedestrian and vehicular route and is a well-recognised part of the street scape.

The building is of a high standard of design and has good aesthetic and historical values, with substantial amounts of original fabric remaining to the external elevations. The use of cream faience and decorative tiling across the façades is characteristic of its time and can be found in a small number of buildings along Oxford Road, though is not standard form in Manchester. Its strong and regular design with the repeating pattern of slimline windows across the facade, adds to the high level of aesthetic value.

There is a degree of associative and communal value associated with the building, having been in use as a publicly accessible venue for many decades and, more recently, as a place of education and entertainment. Its prominent position on Oxford Road gives it a wider communal value as it is experienced by a larger number of people.

Unit

The unit itself has been subject to a number of changes over time. The main glass façade is a later addition from recent years and, whilst it is a sensitive addition, it has no historical value. The positioning of the openings, use of glass as a material, and the plan form of separated street-facing units are evidence of former use and design intention- the commercial shopping 'parade' as distinct from the 'venue' spaces above is particularly noteworthy. The full depth unit volumes remain and is further valuable evidence of previous form. Evidence of the interior design of the original units has not been found, but the ground and first floor were historically linked, as can be seen in the adjacent unit. The layout of the units are symmetrical across the building, confirming that the first floor extending above the corner unit is the original form. The regular window pattern at first floor and its role in the street scape as well as an important feature of the building is an integral part of the original design and is of high importance to its architectural and historical value.

5.0 PROPOSALS + IMPACT

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Proposals are related to the floor above the mezzanine of the unit and the space over Ryman's Stationery (all of which form unit 6a). The scheme seeks to utilise the existing staircase, linking the mezzanine floor with the floor above. A doorway and staircase already exist and will be utilised as part of the proposals. See accompanying drawings for design detail.

Partitions at top of stairs

To the top of the stairs three full height walls are proposed to create fire separation for the plant room. Where the new wall meets the existing beam, it will abut and be sealed, with the beam remaining visible from both sides. There is a degree of harm through the loss of a small section of cornicing where the two walls will intersect. The position of the wall is dictated by the location of the staircase from the floor below. The option to form the wall around the cornicing and seal has been explored but it was concluded it will not provide the necessary fire protection. In mitigation direct intervention has been limited to one area.

Impact on significance: Minor adverse, justified on the basis the amount of loss is minimal and necessary to provide fire separation.

WC provision

The proposed walls forming the WC area sit beneath two existing beams. These will stop short of the full height, forming a pod with a lid. This approach avoids junctions and fixings with existing ceilings and the construction is reversible.

Impact on significance: Neutral

Windows

New furniture proposed will be fitted to the outer edge of the space and along internal walls. These are designed and positioned to avoid interrupting the glazing and windows will remain unobstructed.

Impact on significance: Nil



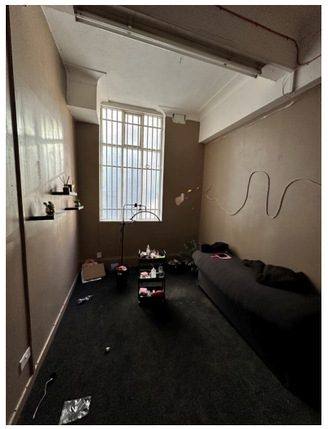
Image: Existing ducting and staircase - location of full height walls.



Image: Existing beams and coving, to be retained- location of half height walls to left and lowered ceiling WC pod to right hand side of photograph.



Image: Partition wall between main space and middle space with lower skirting.



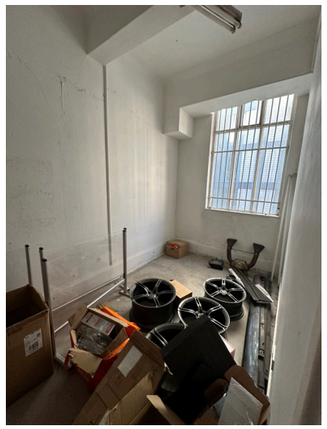


Image (left): Interior of middle space- beam to be retained.
Image (right): Interior of end space.

New openings
Alterations to openings are proposed to internal walls to create party booths and a storage room. Existing walls are full height with non-original door (front dividing wall) and missing door (rear dividing wall). There is coving to the beam but the skirting is significantly smaller than the rest of the space, indicating this is not an original wall. Proposals involve the removal of this wall below beam level and fitting of half height wall, retaining the beam and coving which exists.

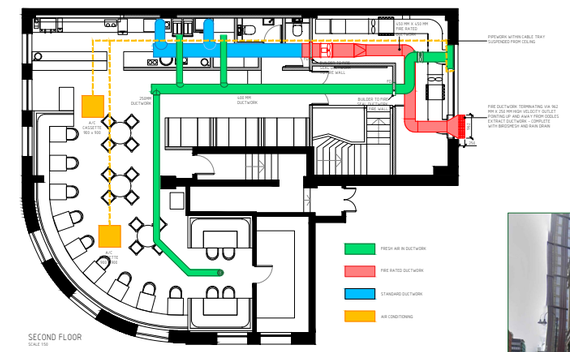
The middle internal partition wall between the two smaller rooms has no coving and a bulkhead running through it, indicating it is a later addition. There is only one door in place and it is not original, and of no heritage value. Proposals involve infilling the existing inner doorway, making a new opening to connect the main space to the party booths.

The separation between the spaces will remain, and spatial volumes retained.
Impact on significance: Negligible

Mechanical + Electrical
Air conditioning, fresh air and other duct work is required to provide services to the unit. This will be suspended from the existing ceiling using anchor bolts to fix. Suspended cable trays will be used where necessary to support duct work.

The minimum number of fixings required for units and runs will be used to limit penetrations into existing fabric.
Impact on significance: Negligible. Whilst there is an aesthetic impact of introducing duct work, the fabric penetrations are limited and the changes are reversible. The mechanical and electrical proposals are considered to be necessary to enabling a re-use of the space.

Fresh air and kitchen ductwork will terminate through the existing window to the rear elevation (Measham Mews) with one new intake and one new extract required. These will fit within the upper sections of the windows, maintaining the framing pattern. Two new air conditioning units are proposed on the rear elevation (Measham Mews) which will be fixed to the wall, sitting below the existing run of units. See accompanying drawings.
Impact on significance: Minor adverse. There is a need to provide ventilation extract and intake and the proposed positions are on the rear elevation which already houses similar. This elevation is secondary and of less aesthetic significance. The window frame form will be retained.



DUCTWORK LAYOUT AND DRAWING SUPPLIED BY JON CLOUGH



REAR ELEVATION PHOTOGRAPH

Image: Proposed M+E layout and terminations to the rear elevation.

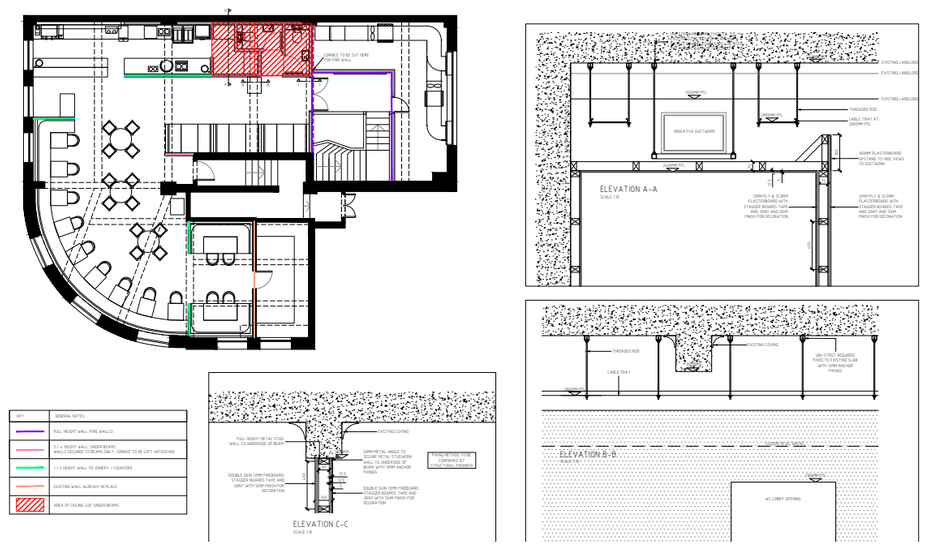


Image: Proposed walls and fixings.

6.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

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National Policy
The main heritage planning consideration affecting this site is its Grade II listed status.
The legislation concerning built heritage is contained within Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Government Policy is set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, updated 2023). Local planning policy is set by Manchester City Council.

Statutory legislation states that special regard should be given to 'the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any feature of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.' Clause 66. Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.

The NPPF recognises that sympathetic changes to heritage assets are necessary to ensure their viable ongoing use, but that alterations must be justified and their impact upon significance assessed. This report meets the requirements of NPPF, paragraph 200, 'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting'. Paragraph 203 states, '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 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 significance of this building will be retained and enhanced through ongoing improvement to a space which is currently partially vacant and unused. Works are considered compatible with historic fabric and seek to adapt the space for re-use, whilst retaining and maintaining the asset for the future.

Paragraph 205 states, 'When considering the impact of proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.'
Proposals have been designed to retain historic features and fabric with the minimal works to historic fabric compatible with its re-use.

Paragraph 208 states, '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.'

Proposals demonstrate limited instances of less than substantial harm- the intervention with coving where fire resistant walls are to be added around the plant room and the changes resulting from additional M+E kit. The detrimental impact upon significance is limited and alternative locations would create a greater degree of harm. Reuse of the space requires fire protection to prevent wider risk to the asset, and the minor degree of harm is considered to be outweighed by the greater benefit of this protection. M+E services are considered to be a necessary provision to allow for ongoing re-use of the space, the benefit of which is greater than the minor degree of harm caused by their routing.

Local Policy

Sustainability is a key overarching aim of NPPF and this application is a positive response to that, seeking to re-use existing fabric and to make sensitive repair. Local Manchester City Council policy follows the principles established in the NPPF and is contained within the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, 2012. Of particular relevance is CC9, which states that development should preserve or enhance listed assets.

Places for Everyone is Greater Manchester's joint development plan. Policy JP-P2 relates to heritage and states that particular consideration will be given to ensuring 'the significance of key elements of the historic environment which contribute to Greater Manchester's distinct identity and sense of place are protected from harm' and that positive management and integration of heritage should be informed by 'delivering positive benefits that sustain and enhance the historic environment as well as contributing to the economic vitality, accessibility and environmental quality of a place.'

The proposals are considered to accord with local and national policy.

7.0 CONCLUSION

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The Dancehouse is a building of high heritage importance and is listed at Grade II. The Art Deco styled building was historically an entertainment venue - opening as a cinema in 1930. Independent shop units at street level were part of the original plan form, as was the connection between ground and first floors, which still exists, now with a new staircase and with a door blocking the ground/first link.

The proposals relate to the upper storey of the unit (officially the first floor, though called the second floor due to existence of mezzanine). The works are intended to allow for re-use of the vacant upper floor and mainly relate to seating, fire separation of plant room and minor alterations to openings to two existing sub-rooms.

There is no major harm to significance caused by the proposals. There is a minor loss of historical fabric where fire-rated partitions are to be installed around the plant room. This is justified on the basis it affects an extremely limited portion of coving and is necessary in order to provide an improved and required level of protection against fire risk. The infill of the two doors in the partition walls and creation of alternative openings is a change to features with no special historic or architectural interest. The inner of the two walls is unlikely to be original (no coving). These proposals will result in negligible harm through alteration of openings but retain historic walls and a form of opening.

The changes are considered to accord with local and national planning policy.

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