

Planning

Growth & Development

Delegated officer report for planning application

Application no. 138362/FO/2023

Date registered valid: 19 October 2023

Proposal: Construction of a new three storey escape stair and security lodge for Versa Studios, 1 no. car parking space, with landscaping and other associated works.

Address: Versa Studios , Goods Yard Street, Manchester, M3 3GB

Ward(s): Deansgate Ward

Applicant: Mr Andrew Whittaker Allied London

Agent (if any): Mr Michael Percival Deloitte LLP

Case officer: Max Gibson
Tel: 0161 219 6359
Email: maximillian.gibson@manchester.gov.uk

Recommendation: Refuse

Date of recommendation: 05/08/2024

Application details

Type of application: Full Application Consent

Development type: Minor Other

Date of site visit: 30 May 2024

Standard consultations:

Printed: 31 October 2023 Expired: 21 November 2023

Neighbour notifications

Printed: 31 October 2023 Expired: 21 November 2023

Site notice

Posted: 3 November 2023 Expired: 24 November 2023

Press advert

Published: 7 November 2023 Expired: 21 November 2023

Departure from Development Plan: No

Environmental Statement: Not required

Description of site/building

The site relates to the Western elevation of the Old Granada Studios building which fronts onto Goods Yard Street. The elevation comprises a flat expanse of blue engineering brick. The development site is at the southwestern corner of the building at the congruence of Goods Yard Street and Grape Street, between which there is a level change of about one storey managed by a staircase. The site falls within the Castlefield Conservation Area and there is a Grade II listed building to the south of the site across Grape Street.

Listed building: Not applicable

Conservation area: Castlefield Conservation Area 1979

Tree Preservation Order: n/a

Description of area

The area relates to the St John's within Manchester City Centre, which is subject to an approved masterplan through the adopted St John's Strategic Regeneration Framework. It is bounded by Atherton Street to the East, Quay Street to the North, the Science and Industry Museum to the South and Water Street to the West. It is an area of the City Centre that was formerly within Granada Studios and is named Old Granada Studios. The development of this site would provide a further phase of the St John's strategic regeneration area, which sets out to deliver a residential-led mixed-use scheme. It would form an integral part of the regeneration project.

Description of development

The development relates to the creation of a three-storey extension to the Versa Studios building at the Old Granada Studios site. The extension would comprise a metal clad fire

escape staircase and brick off accommodation, with entrances on to both Grape Street and Goods Yard Street. There would be associated landscaping, including the provision of 1no. parking space.

Unauthorised works have taken place at the site including the erection of a steel frame and staircase.

Consultations & Notification Responses

Publicity - a notice was displayed on site advertising the works as those affecting the setting of a listed building and conservation area. A notice was placed in local press advertising the works as those affecting the setting of a listed building and conservation area. Letters were sent to surrounding occupiers notifying them of the development. No representations have been received as a result of this publicity.

Environmental Health - no objections, Construction Management Plan requested to be conditioned.

Issues

The Development Plan

The development plan consists of

- The Manchester Core Strategy Development Plan Document (adopted July 2012);
- The extant Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (adopted 1995);
- The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (adopted March 2024);
- The Guide to Development in Manchester Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance (adopted 2007)

Manchester Core Strategy (2012)

Relevant policies include DM1 (Development Management), SP1 (Spatial Principles), EN1 (Design Principles and Strategic Character Areas), EN3 (Heritage) and CC9 (Design and Heritage).

Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (1995)

Relevant saved policies DC18 (Conservation Areas) and DC19 (Listed Buildings)

Places for Everyone (2024)

Relevant policies include Policy JP-Strat2: City Centre and Policy JP-P2: Heritage

The Guide to Development in Manchester Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance (Adopted 2007)

Chapter 2 'Design' – outlines the City Council's expectations that all new developments should have a high standard of design making a positive contribution to the City's environment. Statement of Case 2 Spinningfields Square

Paragraph 2.7 states that encouragement for "the most appropriate form of development to enliven neighbourhoods and sustain local facilities. The layout of the scheme and the design, scale, massing and orientation of its buildings should achieve a unified form which blends in with, and links to, adjacent areas.

Paragraph 2.8 suggests that in areas of significant change or regeneration, the future role of the area will determine the character and design of both new development and open spaces. It will be important to ensure that the development of new buildings and surrounding landscape relates well to, and helps to enhance, areas that are likely to be retained and contribute to the creation of a positive identity.

Chapter 11 'The City's Character Areas' – the aim of this chapter is to ensure that new developments fit comfortably into and enhance the character of an area of the City, particularly adding to and enhancing the sense of place

St John Strategic Regeneration Framework

The following parts from section 1.1 are considered to be relevant to the development:

Development that is fully integrated both functionally and physically with the city centre and adjoining city centre neighbourhoods

A series of existing and new public landscaped spaces will be created that support a new network of routes and linkages which connect the different parts of the site to its neighbours and the River Irwell, as well as anchoring the major buildings.

The following parts from section 4.2 are considered to be relevant to the development:

A series of existing and new public and semi-public landscaped spaces will be created that support a new network of routes and linkages St John's Strategic Regeneration Framework Update 31 which connect the different parts of the site to its adjoining neighbours and the River Irwell as well as anchoring the major buildings.

In conservation terms, the new network of routes and public spaces will enhance permeability through the Conservation Area and celebrate the site's rejuvenated heritage assets, allowing them to be viewed and enjoyed by the public in a positive and meaningful way.

In addition, there is a real opportunity to reinforce the role of St John's Gardens by addressing the impenetrable nature of the ITV site to its west and reconnecting the site. The space is not currently on a thoroughfare of any sort. The creation of a series of new routes and connections across the site in particular from east to west; providing a strong link between Deansgate through the site to the river.

National Planning Policy Framework

Section 12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

Principle of development

The applicant has outlined within their planning submission that the works are associated with making the adjacent building fire safety compliant. Whilst fire safety is an important consideration, clarification has been sought during the course of the application as to why the opportunity, when the existing building was recently been modernised and refurbished, was not taken to improve the overall fire safety and means of egress in the event of a fire was not taken. Insufficient information has been provided in respect of this together with the impact on the surrounding public realm.

In the absence of an options of appraisals to assess alternative means of escape, which have a minimal impact on the external façade of the development, the principle of the development would not be acceptable.

The proposal, as a result of the siting, scale, design and appearance of the extension would fail to respond positively to the character and appearance of the existing building and within the context of the surrounding area. It would also not contribute positively to the ongoing regeneration and high-quality buildings in this part of the city centre.

The extension would form an incongruous addition to the building and impact more generally on the successful implementation of public realm in the area. These matters are considered in detail in the report below.

Visual amenity

The proposed development would comprise a small three storey extension. Positioned at the head of Studio Way as it meets Grape Street, the extensions footprint and scale would form a large prominent feature in what otherwise would be public realm within associated with the development.

Constructed of blue engineering bricks and mesh, the materiality of the extension, whilst having some relationship to surrounding materials, would form a low quality building in terms of its design and appearance.

Policy DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy states that new development should be *Appropriate siting, layout, scale, form, massing, materials and detail.*

Paragraph 2.7 states that encouragement for *'the most appropriate form of development to enliven neighbourhoods and sustain local facilities. The layout of the scheme and the design, scale, massing and orientation of its buildings should achieve a unified form which blends in with, and links to, adjacent areas.'*

The proposed extension, which would be of a lower height than, and perpendicular orientation to, the main elevation would not achieve a unified form. Instead, the extension would appear as an afterthought, retroactively tacked on to the side of the existing building. It would jut awkwardly from the monolithic expanse of the Versa Studio's Western elevation.

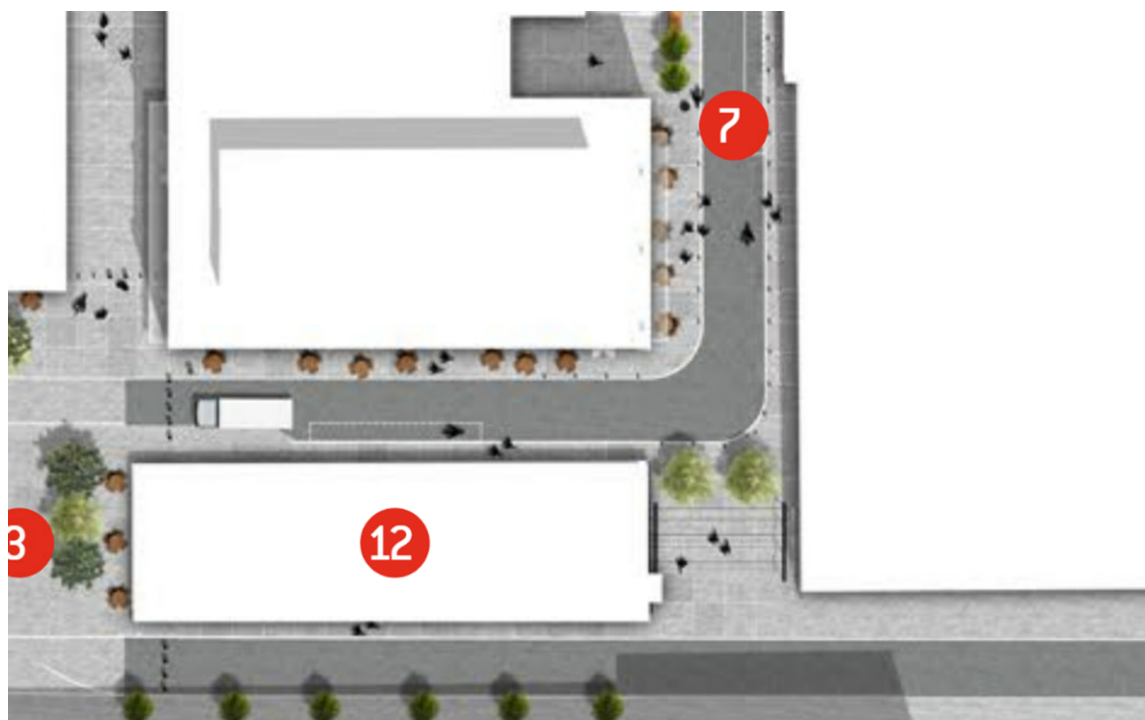
This would be further exacerbated by the proposal to clad the stair core in a mesh cladding, which has no visual or material continuity with the rest of the extension, not indeed with any surrounding built elements at this part of the development.

Impact on public realm

The site is located at the bottom of a staircase that links Goods Yard Street and Grape Street. This staircase serves as important gateway between the historic environment to the south of Grape Street and new development north of Goods Yard Street. Thus, the approach to the public realm here is considered to be of particular importance to the place making of the wider St John's regeneration area.

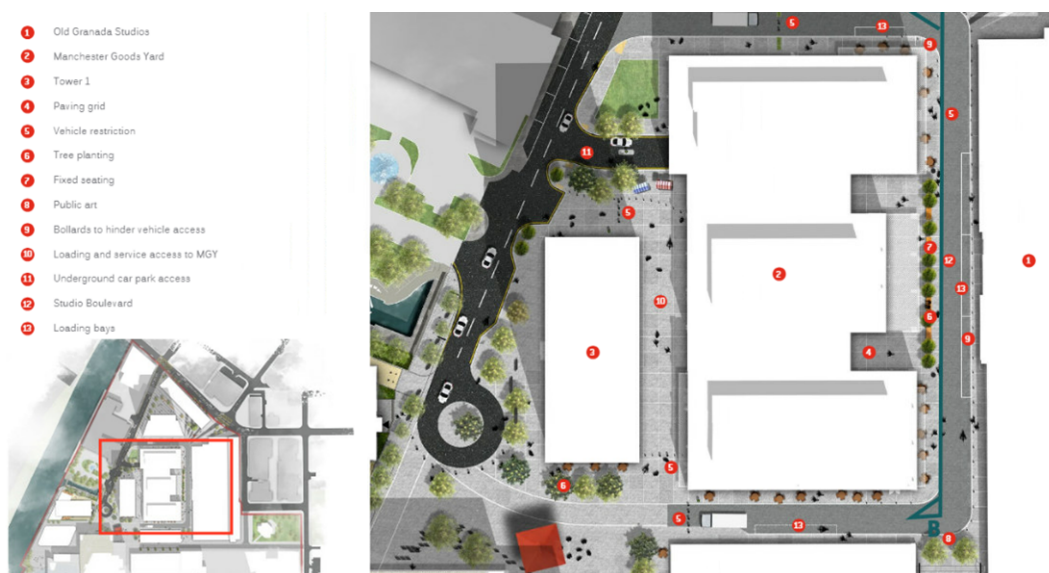
Policy DM1 requires consideration of the *'Impact on the surrounding areas in terms of the design, scale and appearance of the proposed development'*. Policy EN1 states *'Wherever possible the opportunity should be realised to enhance existing and provide new areas of meaningful open space, and the maintenance and improvement of the City's permeability should be considered in all proposals.'* The St John SRF seeks to address *'the impenetrable nature of the ITV site to its west and reconnecting the site'* through *'The creation of a series of new routes and connections across the site in particular from east to west; providing a strong link between Deansgate through the site to the river.'*

The public realm strategy for the area clearly shows a wide flight of stairs descending from Grape Street to Goods Yard Street, where two trees would flank the landing. The Versa Studios building on the right-hand side has a clean, uninterrupted elevation.



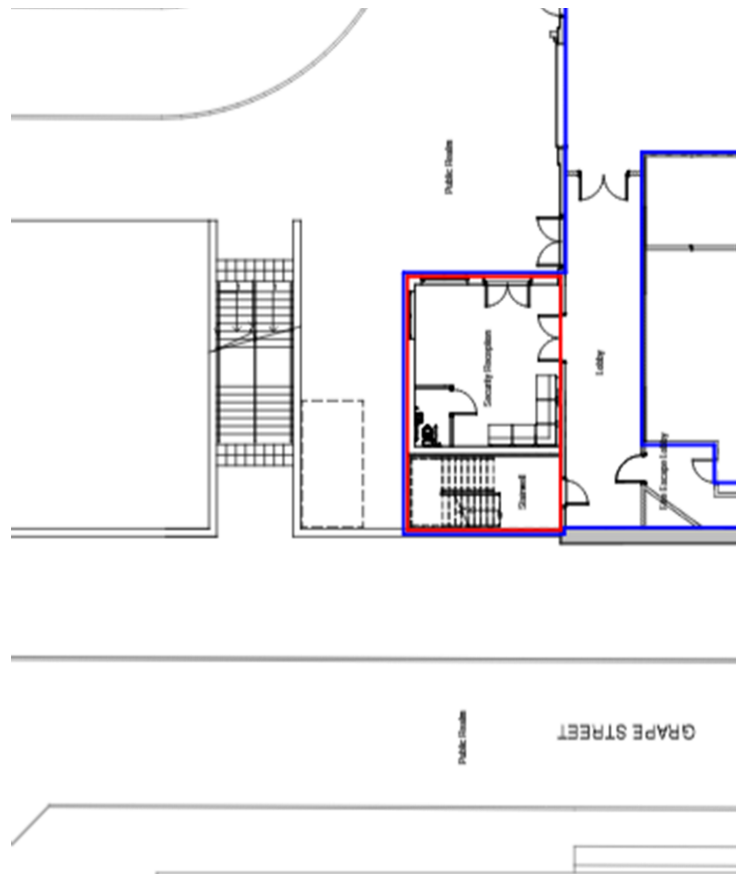
From the public realm strategy approved as part of CDN/22/0135

Furthermore, the site is allocated as an area for a future public art installation, highlighting the aesthetic aspirations for the area.



From the public realm strategy approved as part of CDN/22/0135

The proposal would see the creation of a large, tarmacked area to the west of the extension to create a car parking space. This would significantly narrow the staircase, creating a more alley-like footway of little aesthetic merit. No soft landscaping is proposed, with no trees or other planting identified on the drawings.



Submitted under 138362/FO/2023

There is a change in level from Grape Street down to Goods Yard Street. The narrower staircase, with high gable wall, in combination with a three-storey extension of the would create a shadowy, gloomy space particularly in the area allocated for the carparking space. This is further exacerbated by the dark, flat tarmacadam ground treatment, which is a much lower quality materiality than the paving seen in the public realm strategy.

Rather than delivering a light, tree lined open space, the proposed development would result in an austere, gloomy and awkward corner in a flagship regeneration area. It is clearly at odds with the public realm strategy, delivering a manifestly lower quality space than was envisioned, thereby undermine placemaking aspirations of the St John's SRF.

It also fails to achieve the aims of paragraph 2.7 of the Guide to Development SPD (2007) by creating a physical and visual barrier between two areas of the St John's Development that does not '*achieve a unified form which blends in with, and links to, adjacent areas*'. Given the above, the City Council does not support the proposed development.

Impact on designated heritage assets

The site sits within the Castlefield Conservation Area and within the setting of the Grade II listed Former Grape Street railway bonded warehouse. As per Section 16 of the NPPF, only development that would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of these designated heritage assets would be supported. For this reason, the City Council will only support new development of particularly high-quality design at this location.

Policy DC18.1 (a) i requires the City Council to consider *the relationship of new structure to neighbouring buildings and spaces* in conservation areas. Policy DC19.1 (d) states that the City Council will seek to preserve and enhance the settings of listed buildings by appropriate control over the design of new development in their vicinity. The St John SRF '*In conservation terms,*

the new network of routes and public spaces will enhance permeability through the Conservation Area and celebrate the site's rejuvenated heritage assets, allowing them to be viewed and enjoyed by the public in a positive and meaningful way.' It is considered that the area of public realm under consideration is a key element for delivering this aspiration, as it forms such an important link through to the older section of the site for the newly redeveloped area.

As expounded in the previous two sections of this report, it is considered that the proposed development would be of a low-quality design, which relates poorly to the surrounding built environment in siting, scale and massing, resulting in a detrimental impact on the appearance of the building and adjacent public realm. As it is considered that the proposed development would be harmful to visual amenity, it would fail to preserve or enhance the conservation area.

Thus, it is considered that the development would amount to a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the conservation area, as the development would undermine the otherwise high-quality and design led redevelopment of the Old Granada studios. It would create an awkward and unsightly corner and alleyway, rather than a wide, attractive and inviting link between the older warehouse structures and new residential developments, thus disrupting the visual and physical flow through the wider area, poorly integrating into the wider area. This directly undermines a key aim of the St John SRF that new development in the area should be of *'A form of development that retains and reutilises the site's key heritage assets and integrates those features into the new urban form'*.

It is not considered that this harm is outweighed by any public benefits. Whilst the provision of an emergency staircase would bring a benefit to public safety, the City Council considers, in the absence of other evidence, that it should not be necessary to create a separate, visually obtrusive annex to deliver this benefit and hence this could be delivered in a less harmful manner.

Alternatives

The City Council accepts the need to provide adequate emergency escape routes from the building. The building under consideration is a new development and it is unclear why the necessary emergency exit points were not incorporated into the building's original design. The City Council has requested, although never received, an options appraisal to understand why the applicant has been unable to provide a fire escape internally, with a view to securing a less visually impactful solution that would still provide the needed emergency egress point.

Other Legislative Requirements Equality Act 2010

Section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty) of the Equality Act 2010 requires due regard to the need to: Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act and; Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The Equality Duty does not impose a legal requirement to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment. Compliance with the Equality Duty involves consciously thinking about the aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making.

Human Rights Act 1998 considerations

This application needs to be considered against the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. Under Article 6, the applicants (and those third parties, including local residents, who have made representations) have a right to a fair hearing and to this end the local planning authority must give full consideration to their comments.

Protocol 1 Article 1, and Article 8 where appropriate, confer(s) a right of respect for a person's home, other land and business assets. In taking account of all material considerations, including Council policy as set out in the Core Strategy and saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan, the Director of Planning, Building Control & Licensing has concluded that some rights conferred by these articles on the applicant(s)/objector(s)/resident(s) and other occupiers and owners of nearby land that might be affected may be interfered with but that that interference is in accordance with the law and justified by being in the public interest and on the basis of the planning merits of the development proposal. She believes that any restriction on these rights posed by the recommendation given is proportionate to the wider benefits of and that such a decision falls within the margin of discretion afforded to the Council under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

Recommendation: Refuse

Article 35 Declaration

Officers have worked with the applicant in a positive and pro-active manner to seek solutions to problems arising in relation to dealing with the planning application. Matters were raised with the applicant during the course of the application. This has included ongoing discussions about the information required to be submitted to support the application and the acceptability of the proposals. Unfortunately, the issues with this application couldn't be resolved.

Reason for recommendation to refuse

1) The proposed staircase and associated works, by virtue of its siting, scale, mass and appearance, fails to respond positively to the architecture of the adjacent building and has a detrimental impact on the delivery of surrounding public realm. The construction of the proposed extension would create an awkward and incongruous structure with no visual continuity with the adjacent building or other surrounding buildings. It would create a dark, unwelcoming space that would be in conflict with the public realm strategy for the wider St Johns development, thereby undermining the quality of this landmark regeneration area. Furthermore, this would have a detrimental impact on nearby designated heritage assets and the required public benefits to outweigh this harm are not sufficient. The proposal is therefore contrary to the provision of policies DM1, SP1, EN1, EN3 and CC9 of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012), saved policies DC18 and DC19 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (1995), Policies JP-Strat2 and JP-P2 of Places for Everyone, Chapters 2 and 11 of the Guide to Development in Manchester SPD (2007), St Johns Regeneration Framework, and the National Planning Policy Framework, in particular section 12.

Appendix 1 – List of consultees & neighbours notified

Environmental Health

8 Goods Yard Street, Manchester, M3 3BG

Bonded Warehouse, 18 Lower Byrom Street, Manchester, M3 4AP

Appendix 2 – Planning constraints

Article 4 Direction - City Centre PD Restriction - Class B1(a) To C3

Article 4 Direction - Removal Of PD Rights Change Of Use From Class C3 To Class C4

Aircraft Safeguarding Zone - Aircraft Safeguarding Zone - All Exceeding 90M

Coal Authority - Development Low Risk - Name: DEVELOPMENT_LOW_RISK_AREA

Conservation Area - Castlefield Conservation Area 1979

Area Team Boundary - Name: CENTRAL