

STUDIO DJL

The Palace Theatre, Manchester – Wireless
Access Point Installation
Design + Access + Heritage Statement
October 2023



STUDIO DJL

Danny Lane

Architect

danny@studiodjl.com

+44 (0)7729 369 945

studiodjl.com



Don Anthony

Network Project Manager

donanthony@theambassadors.com

+44 (0)7769 271 943

atg.co.uk



Andy Betts

a.betts@node4.co.uk

+44 (0)345 123 2222

node4.co.uk

Contents

- Executive Summary	4
- Heritage Assessment	5
- Relevant Planning History	7
- Design + Access	8
- Heritage Impact Assessment	10
- Conclusion	12

Executive Summary

Project: The Palace Theatre, Manchester, Wireless Access Point Installation

Address: The Palace Theatre, 97 Oxford St, Manchester, M1 6FT

Project Ref.: 2334-03

This report has been prepared to accompany the listed building consent application relating to the installation of wireless access points at the Palace Theatre, Manchester.

The proposal has fully taken into consideration the important historical and architectural significance of the Palace Theatre. It is a venue that holds an important place in the history of Manchester and continues to play a vital role in the cultural life of the city. The theatre requires careful development to preserve the building for both its special architectural qualities and the memorable events that have taken place within.

The proposal seeks to improve access to wireless data for patrons, staff and visitors. The upgrades to the existing wireless data infrastructure will facilitate better experiences for audience members and ensure that the Palace remains an important and successful performance venue.

The following report identifies the relevant heritage value of the building and the wider context, notes relevant planning history, sets out the reasoning behind the design choices made, and finally states why the proposal is considered to be in accordance with listed building consent.

To be read in conjunction with:

2334-03-DJL-00-P-011 Site Location Plan

Wireless Survey Report - Manchester Palace - 8 August 2022

Meraki MR42 Data Sheet

Meraki MR45 Data Sheet

Meraki MR46 Data Sheet



Original Facade

Heritage Assessment

Overview

The applicant site is officially listed as ‘The Palace Theatre’ and located on Oxford Street in central Manchester.

The Theatre was listed on 8 June 1977 and is Grade II. The listing states:

Theatre. 1891, by Alfred Darbyshire and F.Bennett Smith; altered 1913 by Bertie Crewe of London; re-fronted 1956. Probably iron-framed, clad with brick and now faced with buff glazed terracotta; slate roof. Rectangular plan. Three storeys and basement. The facade, in debased modern classical style, is of less interest than the INTERIOR: auditorium with two tiers of segmentally curved balconies (the Circle and the Grand Tier) with bowed ends, the fronts decorated with continuous series of cartouches, anthemions, etc, and two tiers of boxes carried by standing Atlantes, with tetrastyle architraves of giant fluted Ionic columns; and a circular dome in the ceiling with a hinged lighting panel. Circle promenade with Ionic columns and semi-columns, and elaborate pedimented architraves to the staircase doors.

The theatre sits within the wider Whitworth Street Conservation Area. This conservation area comprises a well preserved collection of Victorian and Edwardian buildings that are distinctly Mancunian in their architecture and context. As the centre of textile production in the world, this area was developed with large warehouses that stored cotton and provided office space. The wealth generated by the industry resulted in ornate and distinctive facades that line Whitworth Street and Princess Street. These buildings have now been converted into other uses including commercial office space and residential. Many of these are listed.

Several grand public buildings exist in the area, of which the Palace Theatre is one example, located at the conservations area’s south western corner. Originally a fine example of the architecture of the area, the replacement of the facade in the 50s due to bomb damage has resulted in an anomaly in the street scene. However, the interior of the theatre and in particular its auditorium, contribute strongly toward the architectural and cultural heritage of the area.



Location of the Palace Theatre in Whitworth Street Conservation Area

Cultural Heritage

Designed by Alfred Derbyshire and opened as the Manchester Palace of Varieties in 1891 with a capacity 3675, the Palace has been operated continuously as a theatre ever since. It opened with a performance of the ballet *Cleopatra* and as its name suggested, hosted a variety of acts throughout the music hall era. This included names such as Marie Lloyd, Little Tich, Charlie Chaplin and Vesta Tilley.

In the late 70s when theatre attendance was in severe decline, it was suggested to close or convert the theatre to another use. However, it was saved by the Manchester Palace Trust and became Manchester's primary touring production theatre, opening with Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It is one of the most important theatres in Manchester and was purchased by the Ambassador Theatre Group in 2009. It continues to prosper to this day.

Architectural heritage

Frank Matcham made some alterations to the theatre in 1899 and in 1913 the playhouse was completely reconfigured by Bertie Crewe, resulting in the current arrangement of stalls and balconies. The Theatres Trust note the similarities with the Opera House, Manchester in terms of auditorium design, but suggests that the Palace is theatrically superior due to the proportions and relationship between the balconies, stage and proscenium.

The listing for the building focuses on the rich ornamentation of the auditorium and the geometry of the balconies. The execution of neo-classical styles is considered of high quality and features many delicate elements of architectural importance. This includes columns, balcony front cartouches and heavily ornamented doorways and a domed coffered ceiling. These details can be found elsewhere in the front of house spaces, although more sporadically and less well preserved. The back of house spaces feature minimal important architectural details, with many of the finishes being modern and perfunctory.

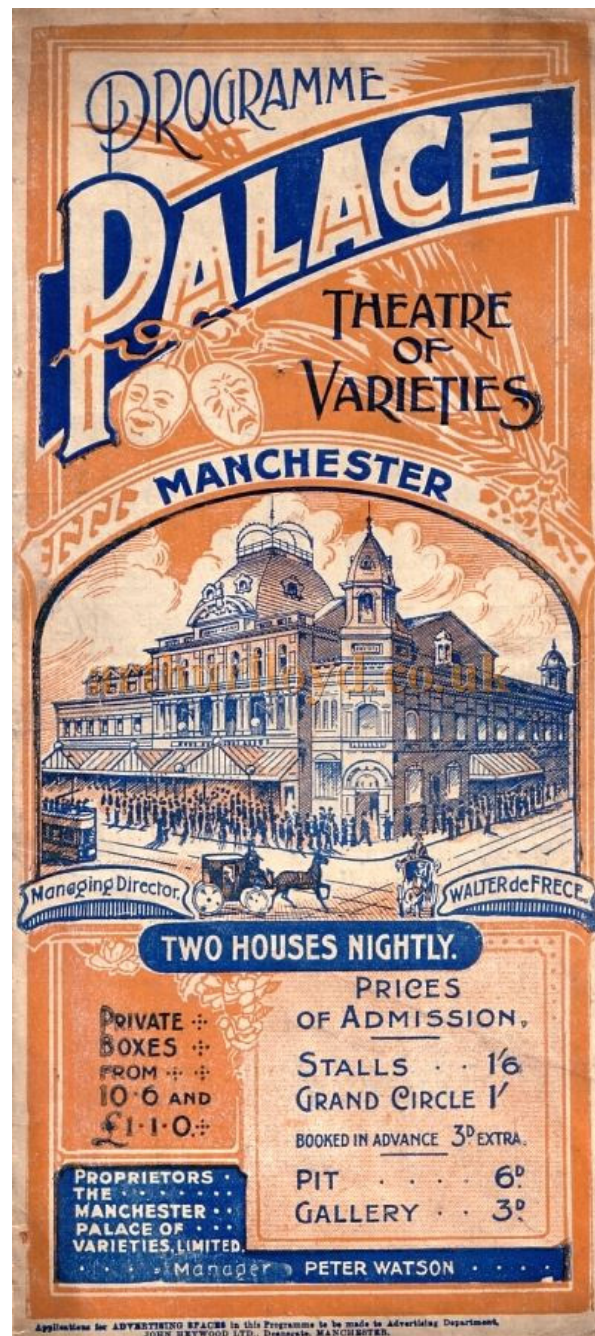
In the 1950s, the original opulent Victorian facade was removed and replaced with a modern expanse of faience tiles. This refacing is in stark contrast to the rich and heavily ornamental architecture that surrounds the theatre and is considered by many as a regrettable and insensitive alteration.

As part of the redevelopment of the theatre in 1979, the Palace was significantly altered to include a deeper stage, taller fly tower and general improvements to the support spaces including dressing rooms. The current capacity is 1955.

Overall, the theatre's architectural significance is centered on the auditorium and its opulent design. By extension, all architectural features from this period should be considered of equal importance and all proposed works should take these into account.



View of the auditorium



Historic programme

Relevant Planning History

Given the scale and importance of the theatre, many planning and listed building consent applications have been made. Below is a summary of key applications that are relevant to the proposal:

May 1978

Listed building consent ref: F08775/LB

Permission was granted the erection of a new dressing room wing and alterations to the stage, fly tower and orchestra pit.

September 2001

Listed building consent ref: 062341/lo/city3/01

Permission was granted for repairs to the facade, alterations tot he box office and interior

January 2017

Listed building consent ref: 117613/LO/2017

Permission was granted for alterations and redecoration of the grand tier and stalls bar

December 2022

Listed building consent ref: 135840/LO/2022

Permission was granted for the installation of new plant to the roof

Design + Access

Overview

The design proposes to upgrade the existing wireless data access throughout the theatre for patrons, staff and visitors. The key reasons for this programme of work are as follows:

- To facilitate the rollout of a reliable and standardized hearing assistance technology that will improve accessibility and inclusivity for all patrons of the theatre. This will ensure that all patrons including those with hearing and vision impairments can enjoy the performances with amplified sound and audio description from anywhere within the auditorium, an upgrade on the current offering which relies on line of sight to be operational. This will further ensure that the venue fulfils their duty as a service provider under the Equality Act 2010, providing an auxiliary aid to those who would otherwise be unable to enjoy the performance for reasons pertaining to disability.
- The new installation will also allow the use of ‘Gala Pro’. An app with on demand captioning and audio description for those who require access to this, meaning that they will be able to attend any performance rather than only being able to attend the specific Audio Described/Captioned performance. In addition, the on demand captioning service may be beneficial to those who speak English as a second language, so that they may be able to follow the dialogue for further understanding.
- Improve access to WiFi for patrons in a time of ever increasing use of smart devices. This includes access to social media that helps promote the venue, access to online services such as programmes, ticket booking, ordering food and drinks from within the auditorium and also audience participation during certain performances (for example casting votes in a talent show).
- Facilitate electronic point of sale (EPoS) terminals in the auditorium to take payments using wireless PDQs
- Improve WiFi performance for staff and visitors to the building who require high speed Internet access for a range of typical activities required to run a theatre.

These works are crucial to ensure the theatre can remain a primary venue in the city and help broaden the demographic of patrons including those who were deterred from visiting in the past due to hearing impairments.

Current Installation

The current installation of wireless access points include a number of units installed throughout both the front and back of house areas. The coverage can be sporadic and will be unable to handle the future demands of wireless data commensurate with expected use. Nor can it facilitate the requirements for the new hearing assistance technology or EPoS use in the auditorium.

Generally speaking, the current units have been installed in a sensitive manner, making use of clusters of other surface mounted electrical hardware and set out neatly in front of house areas where original or important architectural details are present. By being surface mounted, including surface mounted trunking where required, these units have not made a permanent impact on the theatre’s historical fabric.

Proposed Installation

A comprehensive survey of the current wireless installation has been undertaken, identifying the upgrades necessary to provide the required coverage. Please refer to the report included in the application for the full summary of this survey. The report has proposed suitable locations for the wireless access points to ensure good coverage. Studio DJL have worked with Node4 to identify locations that meet both the technical requirements of the theatre, but also preserve and enhance the architectural quality of the building.

Many of the access points are located in back of house areas where there is little evidence of important architectural features. These are mostly perfunctory spaces with

modern finishes and feature many different exposed services. Whilst these spaces are less architecturally significant than the public areas, it is still important that all works are installed sensitively and in a way that does not interfere with the original fabric of the building.

Areas of more careful and precise installation include the front of house circulation areas, bars and the auditorium. The primary objective of the upgrade works is to provide adequate coverage during a performance and so it will be necessary to install wireless access points within the auditorium. As the heritage assessment describes, the auditorium is of particularly special importance. So it is crucial that the installation of the units does not detract from the architectural character of the space.

Method of Installation

Where ever new wireless access points are to be installed, this will be done as sensitively and discreetly as possible with the utmost care taken to preserve the original fabric and overall appearance of the building's interior. This is particularly important in the front of house spaces and the auditorium. The following methods will be utilized during the installation of the works.

- Wherever possible, new hardware will be installed adjacent to existing clusters of electrical units. This will reduce the overall impact of technical infrastructure.
- New units will be installed in discrete locations whenever possible. Given the nature of the technology, it is sometimes necessary to install the units at high level for maximum coverage. This also minimizes the number of units required. Where units are visible, they are to be fixed sensitively and in proportion with the surrounding architectural features such as paneling, mouldings and timber work. They should be set out carefully and in such a way that does not detract from the overall elegance of the interior.

- Existing conduit for running cables will be utilized for new installations wherever this is practical.
- Where re-use of existing conduit is not possible, new surface mounted conduit will be used. This will be installed discretely, be as narrow as possible and run along existing architectural features such as dado rails to reduce the visual impact on the interior. Conduit should be of high quality durable material, finished to blend into the finishes, and fixed in a way that minimizes damage to the fabric of the building and allows for easy removal and replacement in the future.
- In limited situations where it is not practical to use surface mounted conduit or where it would have an adverse effect on the special character of the building (such as long exposed run across a blank wall or ceiling), penetrations in the existing walls and ceilings will need to be made. These should be as small as possible and be prioritized to non-original elements of the building. Cables should make use of existing voids wherever possible to avoid needing to chase into any surfaces.
- All wireless access point units should be fixed in a way that minimizes damage to the fabric of the building and allows for easy removal and replacement in the future.

Heritage Impact Assessment

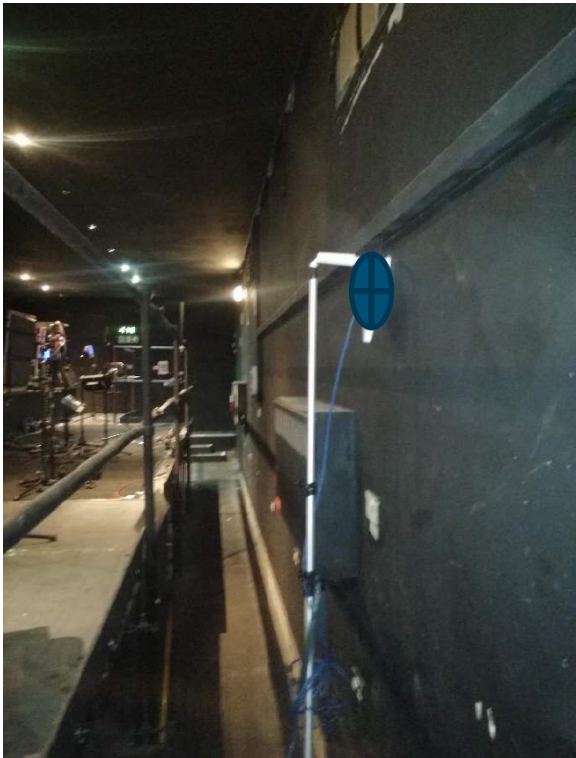
Overview

To demonstrate how the design has taken into consideration the impact of the architectural and historical heritage of the theatre, a selection of proposed wireless access point locations have been presented below. Please refer to the wireless survey report for plans and images showing the location of all proposed points.

Back of House Spaces



Location AP 2 - Sub stage - fixed to modern blockwork wall - no heritage value identified at this location.



Location AP 6 - Basement level - Functional space with no apparent elements of significance. Unit will make use of existing conduit runs.

Front of House Spaces



Location AP 14 - Stalls Floor - Unit is at high level and centered on the door in low prominence location.



Location AP 24 - Ground Floor Corridor - Unit at high level. Where no existing route exists, discrete surface mounted conduit will be used.



Location AP 32 - Circle Floor one - Unit is at high level and centered on the door in low prominence location.

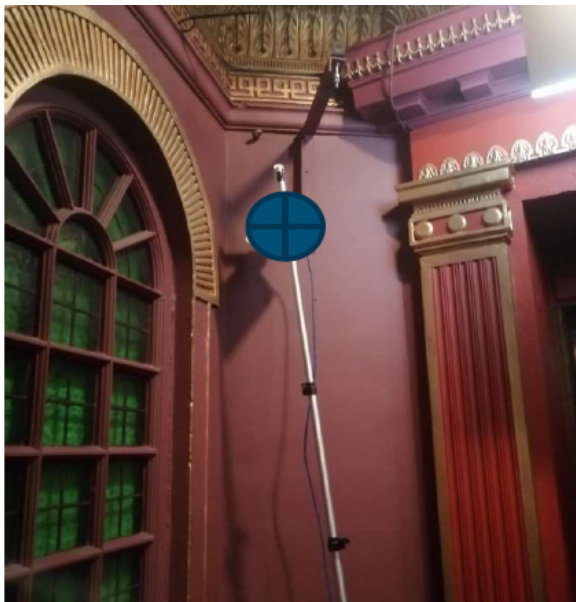


Location AP 36 - Circle Floor one - Unit is at high level and centered on the door in low prominence location.

Auditorium



Location AP A3 - Stalls level - unit installed discreetly within existing cluster of electrical units.



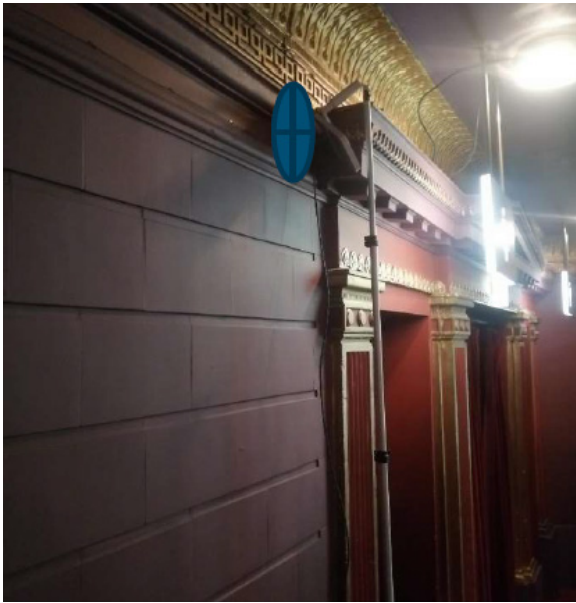
Location AP A4 - Stalls level - unit installed symmetrically on blank wall between architraves



Location AP A13 - Stalls level - unit installed symmetrically on blank wall between architraves



Location AP A5 - Stalls level - unit fixed discreetly adjacent to cornicing and in close proximity to existing conduit.



Location AP A12 - Stalls level - unit discreetly and in line with architrave.

Conclusion

Having identified the elements of the theatre that constitute the historic and special architectural character of the building, this report concludes that those elements have been protected:

- The external appearance and setting of the building will be unaffected
- The impact on the historic elements of architectural significance affected by the proposal are minimal and are not considered to detract from the heritage value of the building. Moreover, they will enhance the experience of visitors and improve the functionality of the venue.
- The installation of wireless access points will be undertaken in a way that will minimize impact on the fabric of the building and in accordance with the method statement included in this report.

Planning policy documents and guidance considered for this application:

- *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*
- *Manchester Local Plan 2012-2027*
- *Whitworth Street Conservation Area - information on manchester.gov.uk*

Thank You

+44 7729369945
Danny@studiodjl.com
www.studiodjl.com

ARB no. 090568B
RIBA no. 20025868
RIBA Chartered Practice no. 20050262

