



Atelier MB
Urban Architects

Listed Building Consent Application

Heritage Statement

Category B fit-out of the First Floor
Lee House 77 Oxford St, Manchester M1 6EG
Client: Slater and Gordon
Date: September 2023
Revision: _





Aerial view of site.

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Introduction

This Heritage Statement accompanies a Listed Building Consent application for the first-floor space at Lee House, 90 Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester, M1 5JW. It was produced by Atelier MB and its author is Laura Jessup, MA History and Theory of Architecture, PGCert. Conservation of the historic Environment. It was written in September 2023.

Location and Description

Lee House is a Grade II listed building located to the rear of the imposing Tootal, Broadhurst Lee headquarters, on Oxford Street in Manchester city centre. It is an extension to the original building (which is Grade II* listed) and was constructed to serve as warehousing for the company. It has its main elevation to Great Bridgewater Street. The proposals relate to the first-floor office area. A description of the building from the listing is included here,

17 November 1987:
 “Warehouse, forming extension to Tootal, Broadhurst and Lee building (56 Oxford Street, q.v.). 1928-31, by Harry S. Fairhurst and Son; uncompleted. Steel frame clad in brown brick with bronze-framed windows and some Portland stone dressings (roof not visible). Rectangular plan. International style. Eight storeys over basement, 6 bays to Bridgewater Street, with broad corner pilasters and narrow chamfered piers all of brick, vertically continuous canted 3-light fenestration with bronze panels between the floors; except in the 6th bay, which has square windows and brick ribbed panels; and the basement-to-1st-floor levels of the first 2 bays (containing a rectangular loading bay), the 4th bay (a doorway and a window above this) and the 6th (1 window to each floor) which are faced in Portland stone with Art Deco ornament. Portland stone capping slightly arched over each bay, with a metal rail attached by brackets and carried round. Right-hand return and rear similar. History: was designed to rise to 217 feet with 17 storeys, completion prevented presumably by the Great Depression of 1929-31.”



Photo of elevation of Lee House.



Aerial view of site.

History

Lee House was designed by Fairhurst and Son and dates from 1928-31. It was built for Tootal, Broadhurst, Lee Ltd. as an extension to their premises at Churchgate House on Oxford Street. The building was used as a commercial textile warehouse and is one of the later examples in the city centre.

Tootal, Broadhurst, Lee were cotton and textile spinners and manufacturers, founded in 1799 and becoming Tootal, Broadhurst, Lee Co. Ltd in 1888. The company enjoyed great success, reflected in the construction of their large office and warehouse built on Oxford Street, Manchester to designs by J. Gibbons Sankey, dated 1896-88. By the late 1930s the firm had several factories and were engaged in spinning, weaving, yarn dyeing, with branches in Leeds, London, Belfast, Birmingham, and Glasgow, and abroad in Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, and New Zealand, in addition to their factories in Greater Manchester and head office on Oxford Street.

When the company started selling directly to the UK retailers in the 1920s, it required additional warehouse storage and Harry S. Fairhurst and Sons were commissioned to design the extension to the existing headquarters of Churchgate House. The new building would be constructed on the Great Bridgewater Street site which had already been purchased in 1918 and would abut the company's existing building, Churchgate House on Oxford Street. In addition, a connecting block was constructed on the other side (parallel to the Rochdale Canal) linking the two buildings and forming a courtyard area.

From its initial conception, the proposals for Lee House went through a process of several redesigns and were worked on by more than one architect, with involvement from Fairhurst



Historic advert for Tootal, with image of Oxford St building (right corner).



Photograph, Lee House, 1955, from Manchester Archives.

and Sons and J. Henry Sellers. There is also an external view painted by Edgar Wood. The existing building was constructed to Fairhurst's design but was initially intended to be much higher; a skyscraper warehouse with "sub-basement, basement, ground, mezzanine and 16 other floors, making a total of 20 in all."¹ The proposed building would have been the highest in Britain if constructed and was featured in the architectural press as a significant move to skyscraper style architecture popular in America. The upper storeys of Lee House were never built, most likely due to a combination of economic factors, both at a company and national level.

There are a number of Fairhurst designed commercial warehouses close to Lee House, including India House, Lancaster House, and Bridgewater House. Harry S. Fairhurst is recognised as one of Manchester's most important commercial architects of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Other notable commissions by the same architect of a similar period to Lee House include Blackfriars House (1923) and Arkwright House (1927).²

In June 1929, J Gerrard and Sons of Swinton were appointed as builders for Lee House. The building was constructed around a steel frame, with 'heather brown' brick used to form vertical piers rising through the building, between bronze-framed bay windows. To the Bridgewater House elevation, there are three sections of Portland stone to the ground and first floors, surrounding the entrance, loading bay and end corner bay. The design is based on a grid form, with large columns at five metre intervals. The size and regularity of the columns is due to the anticipated load of the upper floors, which were never completed. Although the Portland Stone sections are somewhat classical in form, the use of large three-panelled bay glazing and brown brick, with slim piers running the height of the building creates an overall look of modernist industrial architecture.

¹ Builder, 4 March, 1932, p426.

² The windows on Arkwright House give an indication of the originals fitted to Lee House before they were replaced in the later part of the twentieth century.



Internal view of existing space, first floor, showing columns.

Significance

The building is of heritage significance, demonstrated by its Grade II listing and in recognition as its role in the wider Tootal Broadhurst Lee site as an example of large commercial premises built specifically for a leading 19th century textiles company. It has been subject to a moderate degree of ongoing change. Significance is the collective term for the sum of all the heritage values attached to a place as defined by Historic England, who assess significance under four general headings: evidential, historical, aesthetic, and communal value.

Evidential value: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. The building is important evidence of the Tootal company, a well-known UK business of its time. It also gives insight into the economy of Manchester and the architectural style of 19th and 20th century commercial properties. Its evidential value (overall) is high, however, the changes to the interior have degraded some of this value, removing features which allowed the purpose to be better understood. and in places, obscuring historic fabric. Within the space the areas of evidential value are the structure (beams and columns) and the windows.

Historical value: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present- it tends to be illustrative or associative. The building is a reflection of commercial business in Manchester in the 19/20th centuries and the importance placed on company headquarters. It offers interesting insight into the early plans for skyscraper structures (proposed Lee House). The original fabric is of medium/high historical value, including the columns, walls and windows. Modern additional interventions have no historical value.



Internal view of existing space, first floor, showing M and E arrangement.

Aesthetic value: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. This is a building of high design quality and with carefully crafted decoration. It is a dominant feature on Oxford Street and adds to the character and identity of this part of the city. It has a high aesthetic value. Internal features within the first-floor space are limited in value and the historic columns and windows are the main elements of aesthetic interest, along with the spatial qualities of the space, revealed through the more recent refurbishment works.

Communal value: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. This is a recognised landmark building in the streetscape and is experienced by a great number of passers-by and by those who work and have worked there. It retains a medium level of communal significance, related to its external elevations and those remaining internal features.

Lee House is of high evidential value in terms of the evolution of the workspace and architectural style of commercial buildings. It also has associative and historical value as part of a larger original plan to create an unusually tall building for the period (albeit not fully executed). The design of the elevation with regular windows between structural columns has aesthetic and historical value. The band of white stone was originally intended to run up the building but was confined to lower storey when the idea of a skyscraper was shelved.

Proposals and Impact

The proposals relate to the first-floor interior only and have been designed to serve the needs of a new commercial tenant within the space.

The changes comprise:

Addition of new internal partitions to form meeting spaces and privacy rooms associated with the sensitive nature of some aspects of the tenant's business.

The reconfiguration and additions to mechanical and engineering kit at ceiling level.

The windows, floors and all external elevations are unaffected by these proposals.

Existing

Currently the space is mostly open plan, with a limited number of partitions which have mostly glazed walls. To the ceilings, the down stand beams are visible and the structural columns in grid form, and squared in form, also form a key part of the space. Beams and columns run in a grid form to the majority of the space, with a double open bay section to the far, canal facing side. The character is open plan, creating an airy space, benefitting from natural light provided by the windows. Raised access floor are already in place as is an amount of mechanical and electrical kit serving the renovated space and approved in a previous application, reference number 130451/LO/2021.

Proposed

Partitions are proposed to create meeting rooms, focus rooms and a document services area using a mixture of glazed and solid partition walls. Wherever possible glass has been used, to retain the sense of openness, natural light, and the longer views of the space. this is particularly important to the side meeting rooms (4 and 5) and corner meeting room number 6, where glass walls will allow the natural light flow from the windows to be retained.

Where glazing is not possible for privacy reasons (due to the nature of the tenant's business) and to allow for screen fittings, sections of solid partitions are proposed. To mitigate the impact of this, each newly created area has an element of glazing in the walls to at least one side. the largest internal space to be created is the document storage area, where, in mitigation, glass has been introduced to a section of the longest partition and the side partition. This area was previously subdivided as the former location of the toilet block, which was moved as part of the previous refurbishment. Where new walls meet existing fabric, they have been positioned to the centre of existing beams, to allow for views and reading of the significant features from both sides. The existing structure is wide enough to accommodate the new partitions and retain sections of visible historic fabric to either side.

Whilst additional partitions introduce a degree of subdivision, this is not at a level considered to be detrimental to the overall character of the space, nor to impact adversely upon historic fabric. The new walls are sited to the edges of the floorplate, leaving an area of central space open and the canal-facing side with its larger open area unobstructed. All columns will remain visible, and all partitions will use minimal fixings to ceiling and where they abut existing columns. The inserted partitions are reversible and will not create any permanent alterations to the space. Care has been taken to ensure there are no clashes between new interventions and existing windows.

A number of changes are required to the M and E provision and layout, please refer to drawings. These alterations follow the established format of fixing and positioning established in the previous application, with structural soffits exposed, and are not considered to result in any level of additional harm to evidential or historical significance.

Planning Context

National policy

Heritage policy is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (revised 2021).

Paragraph 194 states that applicants should be required to describe significance of the assets effected by proposals. This report meets that requirement.

Paragraph 197 states that local 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.

This application is considered to be a positive response to the above policy. Changes will have a minimum impact upon the overall significance of the asset, the harm being considered limited and minor. The ongoing use of the large floor plates of Lee House is critical to ensure its sustainable future. These proposals do not include significant subdivision or splitting of the floor plate and are make a positive contribution to economic vitality.

Paragraph 202 state that, '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 proposals are considered to have a neutral impact upon the heritage values of the space. The amount of resulting subdivision is at a level considered to be consistent with retention of the key characteristics and heritage values. There is a great public benefit to retaining the space in ongoing use and occupation.

Local policy

Manchester's Local Development Framework, Core Strategy, adopted July 2012, contains local policy and the council's vision for the city from 2012-2027.

- Policy CC9 states 'design in Manchester City Centre should preserve or enhance the heritage assets that have been identified, including listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled ancient monuments.'
- Policy EN3 concerns heritage and notes that 'proposals which enable the re-use of heritage assets will be encouraged where they are considered consistent with the significance of the heritage asset.'

The proposals preserve the main features of the space, are considered to be consistent with the significance of the Grade II listed asset and accord with local policy.

Levels of harm are generally categorised as substantial or less than substantial. The works proposed do not constitute harm to overall significance and are considered to be neutral in their impact, accompanied by wider public benefit of sustainable ongoing use of the office space.

Conclusion

The proposal is considered to have a neutral impact on the significance of the building and the works would ensure the sustainable use of the building as modern office spaces by upgrading the now outdated spaces to a high-quality standard.



Photograph of exterior of Lee House, main entrance.



-  [ateliermb](#)
-  0161 236 0051
-  [ateliermbarchitects](#)
-  [atelier mb architects](#)
-  info@ateliermb.co.uk
-  Atelier MB Ltd. Suite 2A, Amazon House, Brazil Street, Manchester