



Atelier
Heritage

Amazon House
Internal works to Basement,
Floor 1 and Floor 2

Heritage Statement

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Job: 1978



CONTENTS

- 1.0 INTRODUCTION
- 2.0 LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION
- 3.0 HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE
- 4.0 PROPOSALS AND IMPACT
- 5.0 PLANNING CONTEXT
- 6.0 CONCLUSION



Image 01: Photograph showing the Rochdale Canal side of the building in the early 1970s, with barge moored to side. Amazon House can be identified by the attached fire escape stair. Image taken from Manchester Archives.



Image 02: Photograph of Rochdale Canal side in 1973, with Amazon House identified by fire escape stair. No platform is present externally at this time. Image taken from Manchester Archives.

1.0 Introduction

This Heritage Statement accompanies a Listed Building Consent Application for works to the basement, first and second floor levels of Amazon House, Brazil Street. It was produced by Atelier Heritage in July 2022, and its author is Laura Jessup, MA History and Theory of Architecture, PGCert. Conservation of the Historic Environment.

2.0 Location and Description

Amazon House is a Grade II listed building located on Brazil Street, a short side street running off Sackville Street and connecting to Whitworth Street. The property is within the city centre, to the west of Manchester Piccadilly Station. It is within the Whitworth Street Conservation Area and is Grade II listed.

The building is a redbrick and sandstone former warehouse, dating from the latter half of the 19th century. The listing description is included here,

Shipping and packing warehouse, now...? Probably c.1870; altered. Sandstone ashlar and red brick with sandstone dressings (roof concealed). Small rectangular plan, with loading bay to left. Basement and 5 storeys (the 5th either rebuilt or added), a symmetrical 5-window facade, the 3-bay centre breaking forwards slightly, with rusticated basement, ashlar ground floor with cornice, 1st floor cornice, sill-bands to upper floors. The ground floor is a 4-bay arcade of wide elliptical-headed openings (roundels in the spandrels), with the loading-bay entrance in the first, windows in the centre pair, and a doorway in the 4th (with raised surround and modillioned cornice); the 1st floor has segmental-headed 4-pane sashed windows, those in the centre linked by impost bands and keyed hoodmolds; the 2nd floor has square-headed 4-pane sashes in the centre with linked stone lintels, and segmental-headed sashes in the outer bays; the 3rd floor has round-headed sashed windows with linking impost bands, those in the centre forming an arcade. The top floor, of C20 brick, has C20 windows, with 4 in the centre. Chimney at rear left corner. Interior not inspected. Adjoins rear of 42 and 44 Sackville Street; included for group value.



Image 03: Contemporary photograph showing Brazil Street elevation of Amazon House.

The basement unit is accessed via an independent entrance on Brazil Street. An additional access door is reached via a footbridge over the Rochdale Canal, off Canal Street. It was most recently used as a bar, currently being converted to use as office space.

The upper floors are accessed via a main entrance door off Brazil St.

3.0 History and Significance

Amazon House was constructed as a small sized shipping and packing warehouse, one of a significant number in the area around Sackville Street/Whitworth Street. Brazil Street itself was a narrow street lined with red brick warehouses, forming a route to Brazil Place, with the impressive number 1 Brazil Street at the head of the bend (now demolished). These tightly packed commercial buildings were concerned with the receipt, storing, packing and dispatch of goods. It was common to situate the packing rooms in the basement, useful in this instance with the benefit of the Rochdale Canal on one side and the loading bay on Brazil Street to the other.

The shipping and packing warehouse was a dominant model in Manchester as cotton goods production shifted outwards and the city centre became the key commercial focus for the trade of cotton. With the decline of this trade and industry, the upper floors became used for more general office purposes, the ground floor functioning as an art shop in the latter part of the 20th century, with Metz café bar, and Eden bar situated in the basement and, for a time, on a large barge moored on the Rochdale Canal side. The footbridge was a later addition, built to link the space to Canal Street and also serving the small external deck area outside the basement canal-frontage. Bar use ended in 2018/19 and the space has remained vacant since. The first floor has been vacant since 2021, whilst the 2nd floor is currently fully occupied.

Amazon House is a typical example of late 19th century shipping and packing warehouse form, common to this area of Manchester City Centre. Characteristic features include a rusticated plinth, carved sandstone details to windows, the use of red brick and timber sash windows, an integral loading bay, high quality decorative external



Image 4: Photograph showing Rochdale Canal side of building with lock, 1973. Taken from Manchester Archives.

elevations and a lightwell. As one of a larger group of similar styled warehousing in this part of the city, the building has a group value, contributing to the character of the area. It has a strong street presence as an example of historic architectural form. The canal facing elevation also has heritage significance, its relationship with the waterway has changed, but remains an important part of its character.

The Whitworth Street Conservation Area contains many of Manchester's most important buildings, including dense clusters of former cotton warehousing.

The external elevations are restrained, but decorative, with a high-quality design and attractive detailing. There have been changes to the windows in places, but the fenestration pattern is generally well preserved. There have been alterations to the basement elevation on the canal street side, but the whole retains a level of aesthetic and evidential value.

Internal walls are a mixture of plastered surfaces and exposed brick. They display few features, being standard wall structure, but have value as part of the original fabric. Original cast iron columns, timber floors and exposed beams are typical construction elements for the building type and age. They can be found throughout the floors of Amazon House and have medium evidential and historical significance.

Window opening and windows are of high significance as are the external elevations. There are no changes proposed to these elements as part of this application.

The basement has a raised internal timber platform to the canal-side. This serves as access to the external decking, which now links to the footbridge. The age of this internal raised area is uncertain. As it enables a link with the waterway, it is possible some kind of decking was originally located in this area but notwithstanding that supposition, it has clearly been altered to a great extent as the presence of concrete to support the outside deck and modern blockwork is situated underneath the decking, indicating it has been rebuilt likely in the mid-1990s when the outside deck and footbridge were constructed. It is basic in construction and its significance is limited given evidence of its rebuilding.



Image 5: Photograph showing view of Amazon House from canal-side, 1970s. Taken from Manchester Archives.



Image 6: Photograph of exterior of Amazon House, taken in the 1990s from Brazil Street side. The former art shop can be seen at ground floor level.



Image 7: Photograph showing typical interior of office spaces with exposed columns and beams.

4.0 Proposals and Impact

The application involves the canal-side suites at basement and first floor and the front suite at second floor level.

The building has undergone refurbishment in recent years and several non-original additions have been removed including partitions and suspended ceilings. An application for the refurbishment of the basement space from café bar to office use was approved in 2020. Application number 127122/FO/2020. This application included the provision of a full height glass meeting room in a location to the rear of the suite.

The current application is intended to meet the requirements of tenants by the creation of glass walled meeting rooms within existing spaces. Further detail can be found on accompanying drawings. In brief the works comprise:

Basement: Full height frameless glass partitions on the raised area within the canal-side suite. Small, limited infill to corner of existing raised deck.

First floor: Full height frameless glass partitions to canal-side suite.

Second floor: Full height glass partition to create a soundproof meeting room within the second-floor front (Brazil Street-facing) unit.

Partition insertion to form meeting space is already approved at first floor within the Brazil Street-facing suite.

Limited sized bulkheads are required to the new partitions to accommodate existing services (sprinkler system). The new partitions will avoid existing columns and column heads in all instances. Where possible, glass partitions will run parallel to the existing beams and be set away from them. At basement level and first floor level there are instances where the new bulkhead will cross existing beams. To ensure minimal disruption to historic fabric, the beams will be retained, and the new intervention shaped to fit around them.



Image 7: Photograph of underside of internal deck showing modern concrete, supporting the external deck, which was added in 1994.

The impact of inserting full height glass partitions is considered neutral, allowing views to be retained, maintaining natural light within the space, and having a minimum impact on existing structure. There is a limited impact where partitions meet existing walls, but this is negligible and does not constitute harm. Similarly, where bulk heads are created to fit around existing beams, there will be a junction between old and new fabric, but it is very limited and will not exert any harm to the significance of the listed asset. All intervention is reversible and mitigation has been taken to ensure historic fabric is retained and preserved.

Within the basement there is a desire to re-use the internal platform area as meeting space. In order to create a useable area, the proposal is to add a small portion of additional deck within the angled corner; forming a continuous line. This is a very limited portion of infill and is considered to cause no harm to the form, evidential or aesthetic value of the building, given the clear indications this platform is non-original.

5.0 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, and changes will ensure long-term conservation, respecting the materials and form of historic fabric and ensuring the building remains in viable long-term use.

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.'

Levels of harm are generally categorised as substantial or less than substantial. The works proposed do not constitute harm and encourage ongoing re-use of the space. The changes will be neutral in their impact upon fabric and positive in the wider benefit of keeping the listed asset in ongoing use.

7.0 Conclusion

The changes are considered to be minimal interventions within the existing spaces. The meeting room glass partitions echo proposals already approved at other locations within the building. Care has been taken to ensure existing fabric is retained and there are very limited junctions between old and new. The proposed deck infill section is limited to one small area, which will have little impact on the existing space. These changes do not constitute harm to the listed building and the impact upon significance will be negligible. They are beneficial and help to ensure the spaces continue to meet tenant expectations and needs and consequently retain the listed building in viable end use, securing its long-term future. The Conservation Area documentation (Manchester.gov.uk) states that 'there remains a large supply of existing vacant floor space within several significant buildings in the conservation area, and it is important in terms of the character of the area that this space is put to beneficial use'. The proposal meets that desire and is a wholly positive response to local and national heritage policy.



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