

344 Unicorn Grocery Stage 4

Design & Access Statement

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RIBA 
Chartered Practice

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The architects within this
company are registered as
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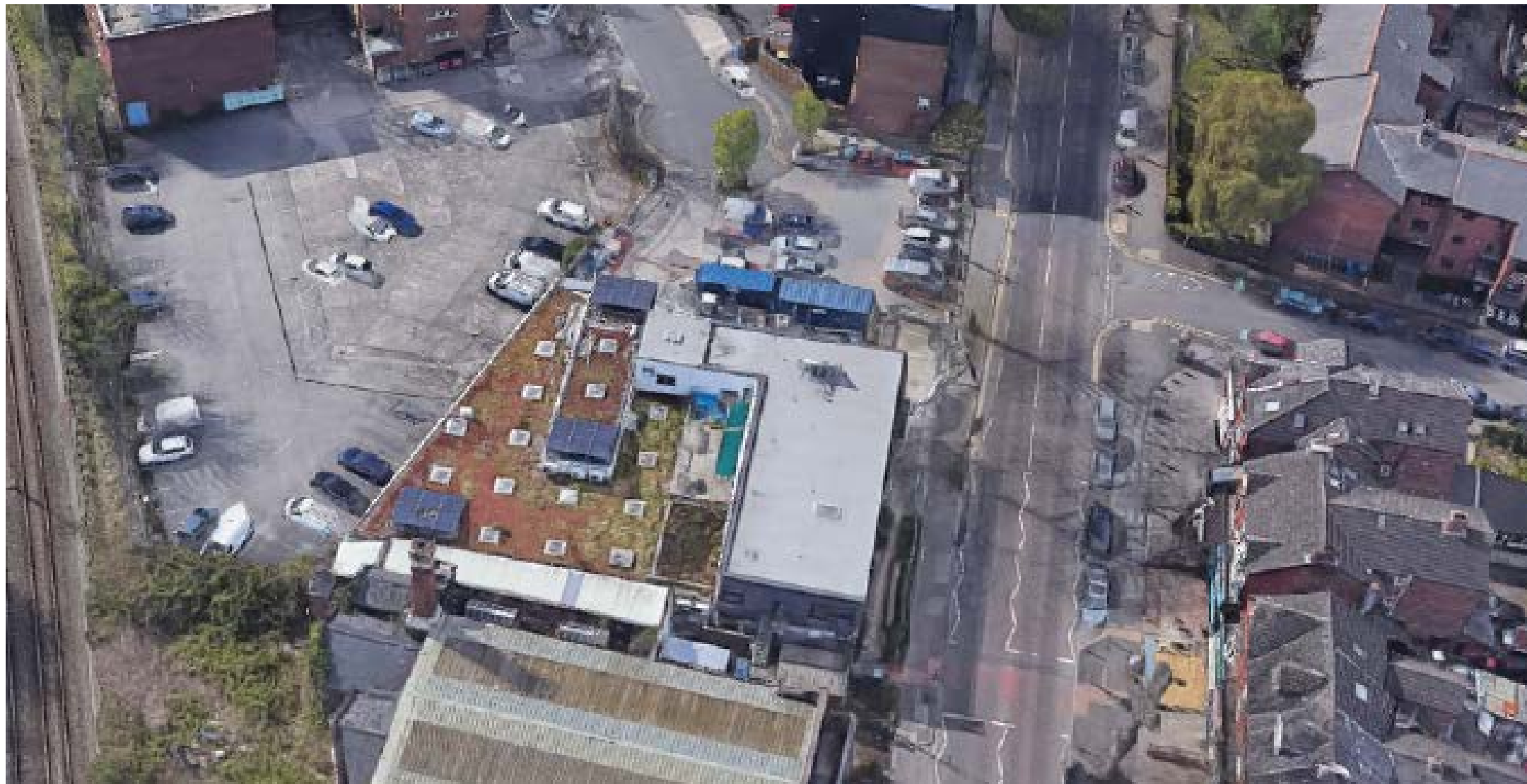


1.0 Introduction

This statement has been prepared on behalf of our client in support of an application for planning permission for the internal remodelling and extension to the property at 89 Albany Road within Manchester City Council.

2.0 Site Location

The application site is 89 Albany Road which provides the vehicular access to the building. The building also fronts Manchester Road and is located in the North of the commercial area of Chorlton. The existing building is adjacent to the Chorlton leisure Centre site and is walking distance from Chorlton Tram Station on Wilbraham Road. The surrounding area is mixed residential and local businesses with a good variety of amenities within walking distance.



Aerial view - copyright Google



3.0 Applicable Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

85a) Promote long-term vitality, allowing local centres to grow and adapt whilst reflecting their distinctive character.

91 c) Enable and support healthy lifestyles such as through local shops, access to healthier food and encouraging cycling.

92 d) Ensure that established shops are able to develop and modernise.

104 d) Provide supporting facilities such as cycle parking.

127 Ensure that developments function well, are visually attractive, are sympathetic to local character and history, are safe, inclusive and accessible.

Manchester Core Strategy

C6 Chorlton - Promote more sustainable shopping patterns and environmental improvements, retain character of local centre - for Chorlton, the large size of the independent sector is significant.

T1 Promote alternatives to the car, improve the cycle network and facilitate modes of transport that reduce carbon emissions.

EN4 Reduce the need for energy in buildings, use low embodied carbon materials

EN8 Reduce the urban heat island effect e.g. through green walls. Control overheating, rainwater



4.0 Existing Building

The existing building is located at 89 Albany Road, Chorlton, Manchester, M21 0BN and appears to have been constructed as a stock depot and offices in 1969. According to images from Manchester libraries photographic archive, the site was vacant and for sale in 1958 as can be viewed in the following links:

- Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester Road, East Side: Land adjoining Chorlton Baths, Chorlton telephone exchange in background <http://images.manchester.gov.uk/web/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=38835&reftable=ecatalogue&refirn=16367>
- Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester Road, East Side: Chorlton Baths looking north east from Richmond Road corner <http://images.manchester.gov.uk/web/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=38834&reftable=ecatalogue&refirn=16358>

Unicorn opened at the site in September 1996, renting just a part of the premises until purchasing the building in 2003 thanks to investment by Unicorn customers and members of the local community buying loanstock bonds. Since then they have developed the site, adding solar panels in 2005 and a rooftop pond and wildlife garden in 2007.

Unicorn has advised that the land owned by them is restricted to the area indicated on the location plan, to include the parking areas and strips of land to the Manchester Road frontage, beyond the existing building footprint. We are not aware of any existing rights of way for neighbouring buildings or owners across the site.

The building is a 2 storey reinforced concrete structure and generally appears to be formed of the original materials. It has single storey extensions both to the north (storage area alongside the leisure centre) and to the south (Public porch/entrance area facing the car park) and has a number of pedestrian entrances/exits at ground floor locations.

The first floor of the building was extended in 2015 to provide a dedicated deli kitchen and staff welfare facilities and to improve the thermal performance and appearance.

A replacement entrance extension was added in 2021, with bike parking and facilities.

The existing lean-to storage space on the north of the Unicorn site shares a wall with the Chorlton Baths Building which is proposed to be demolished in 2023.

There is an existing forklift enclosure which is in a poor state, to the rear of the site.



4.1 Photographs of Existing Building



Existing fence to Chorlton Baths site from Manchester Road, white-painted brick parapet to existing lean-to.



Existing fence to Manchester Road and earlier first floor extension with timber cladding.



View of roof of existing lean-to from green roof, with existing baths wall in the distance.

5.0 The Brief

The client wishes to replace the existing lean-to warehouse area to the north of the building which is currently supported on the party wall with Chorlton Baths that is due to be demolished in Spring 2023.

The replacement is to include:

- Ground and first floor level extensions to the original building.
- Ground floor accommodation with glazing to front elevation to improve shop frontage to Manchester Rd and replace lean-to warehouse area.
- First floor accommodation to increase staff and office facilities for existing staff.
- Façade treatments to unify with existing
- Provide amended access and escape to the first floor
- Rearrangement and increase of cycle storage
- Reconfiguration of existing warehouse spaces to ground floor
- Reconfiguration of existing office spaces to first floor to extend staff areas and facilities
- Replace the existing forklift structure in the same location



6.0 The Proposals

6.1 Design and materials

The side extension replaces and extends the existing lean-to extension, takes a similar form and scale to the existing building, with the same materials. This form is in keeping with the rest of the building and its neighbours, which are similarly flat-roofed. .

A simple palette of the existing materials is used, with the timber cladding continued onto the extension at first floor, with the same aluminium timber composite windows, and painted render below. Painted render is used for the elevation facing the roof garden, to match the existing courtyard walls, with the canopy clad with zinc as used on the entrance extension.

In line with Unicorn’s ethos, the walls of the building (excepting the structural members) are constructed from timber frame. For fire reasons, these are clad with cement panels to the party wall.



6.3 Environmental Improvements

The replacement extension improves the environmental performance of the building - new elements have better u-values than the existing structure, and the more compact form is more efficient. In addition, the first floor windows make the most of natural light, whilst mitigating overheating from the South with the overhanging canopy. This also provides shelter from bad weather.

The flat roof functions as a rainwater collector, providing greywater to flush the staff toilets.

The existing rooftop pond and green roof will be retained, with the roof terrace amended to retain this vital outside greenspace for staff wellbeing.

Materials are as sustainable as possible with low-embodied carbon, with steel minimized and infilled with timber studs and woodfibre insulation.

In the previous phase of the project, elements were reused to create the trolley store. It is proposed to repeat this strategy and reuse materials from the demolished lean-to in the replacement of the existing forklift enclosure, where these are suitable.



6.4 Access

Accessibility, and consequently long-term sustainability, have always been features of the brief for this project. Unicorn aim to respect diversity and promote inclusion in everything that they do. Their Principles summarise this as follows:

‘We believe that all should have an equal opportunity to undertake paid work. Ignorance and prejudice should not be an obstacle to this.’

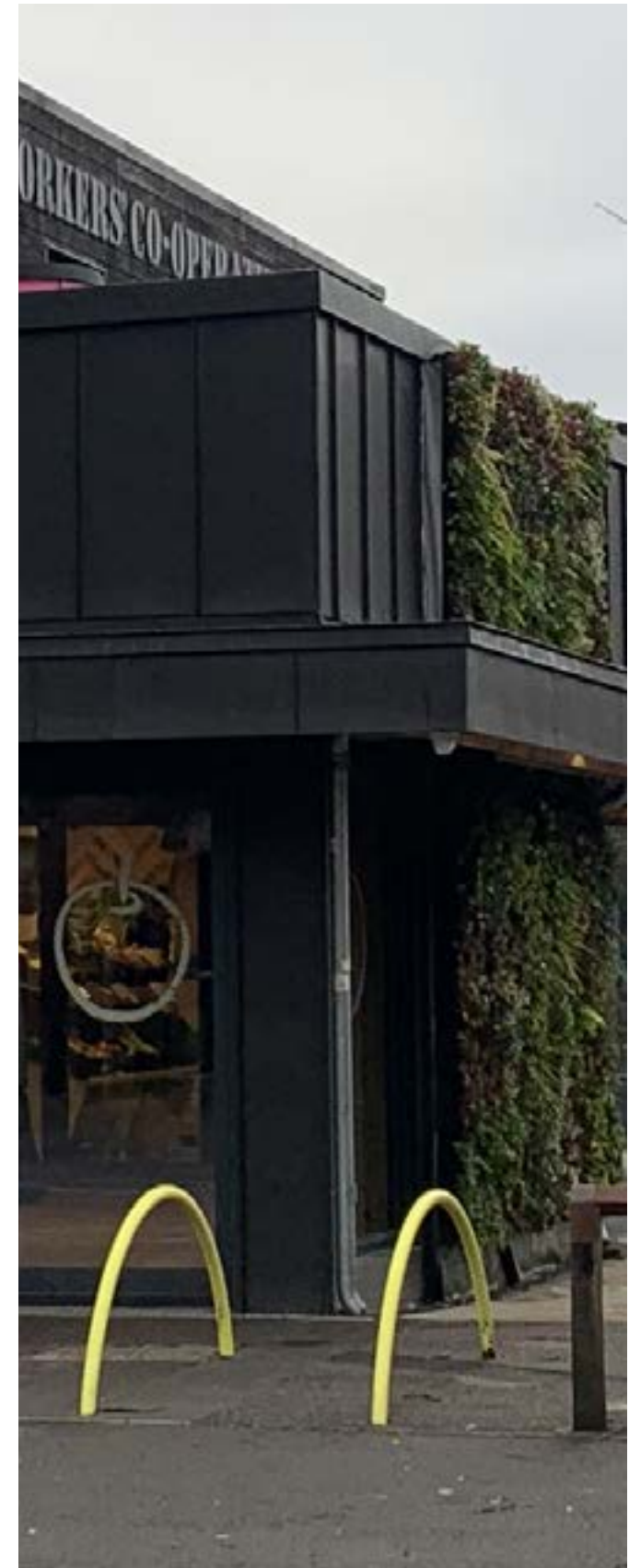
Inside, level access will be maintained throughout the ground floor with the existing platform lift within staff areas providing wheelchair access to first floor level. There is accessible WC provision on both floors and ramped access to the new staff entrance.

New ironmongery will contrast with doors, where possible, and should be large enough to hold easily and not be circular in design. All new external pathways will provide at least 1.2m in width and step free access from Manchester Road.

6.5 Transport

The building is conveniently located near a busy bus route and close to the tram station and can be easily reached by public transport by staff and visitors. Unicorn do not have an explicit transport policy but do offer many incentives for staff to cycle to work, including free labour from a bike mechanic who attends regularly and the Bike to Work Scheme. This phase of works will provide secure internal storage for staff bikes with increased capacity from the existing 26 covered spaces up to 30, including provision for cargo bikes and trailers. This is to accommodate existing demand from existing employees - it is not anticipated that the works will increase the number of staff on site, nor that the new staff facilities will be e.g. available for use by the local community in a way that would require additional parking provision.

There are currently 20 car parking spaces, including 1 accessible space, provided within the car park. There are also 12no standard bike hoops and 4no large bike hoops under cover for customers, plus a bike pump and water station. Cycle provision was improved as part of the previous phase of works, in line with the new Chorlton Cycleway and the Manchester Bee Network. Given Unicorn’s prominent position on the network they anticipated a considerable increase in cycle traffic passing the store and this improved infrastructure was designed, following customer consultation, to ease the journey for existing customers who cycle and customers who currently don’t cycle but wish to more.



7.0 Summary

This application seeks to take advantage of the need to replace the existing extension created by the pending demolition of the neighbouring development, with a more thermally appropriate addition, unifying and improving the external appearance of the building.

The proposals are the latest stage in a carefully considered plan to improve the building environmentally, aesthetically and practically; this stage will address the cramped staff facilities and the main shop frontage whilst continuing to incrementally improve the performance of the existing building.

As a long established local, independent business that enables and supports healthy lifestyles, providing access to healthier food and local retail, Unicorn is a strong asset to the local area, and the proposed changes will allow the established business to develop, making more efficient use of the site and allowing it to respond to the challenges of environmental change.

We believe that the proposals and aims are are strongly in line with local and national planning policies as listed previously.

