

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Proposed Alterations to the Elevation of Existing Commercial Unit
1 Hillcourt Street, Manchester – M1 7HU



The proposal

1. Introduction

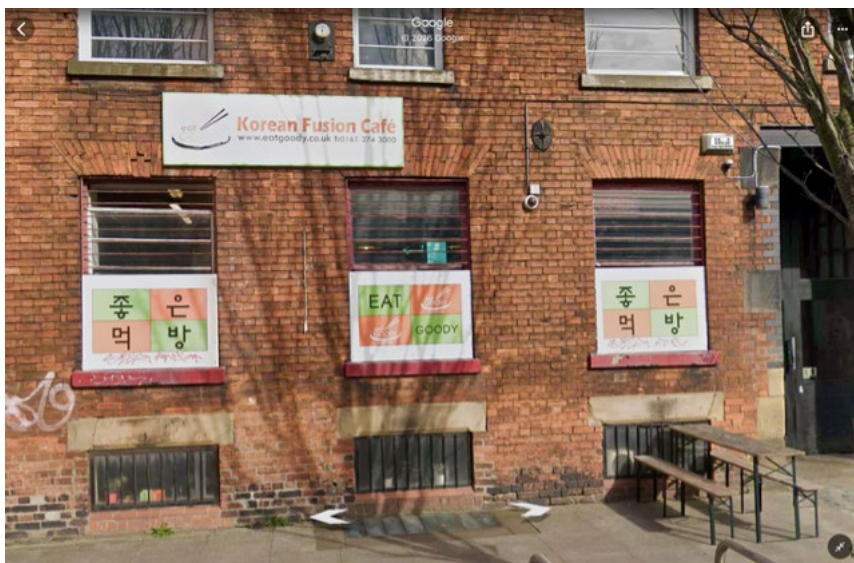
This statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the alteration of an existing commercial unit, comprising the formation of a new entrance door within an existing window opening on the principal elevation.

The proposal has been developed following constructive pre-application discussions with the Local Planning Authority and responds directly to previous refusal reasons. The revised scheme seeks to balance heritage considerations with the delivery of inclusive access and an improved frontage.

2. Site and Surroundings

The application site comprises a ground floor commercial unit located within a traditional red brick building of clear industrial character. The building makes a positive contribution to the local townscape and is considered to hold non-designated heritage value. The site is located within a mixed commercial area with active street frontage.

The principal elevation is characterised by a series of vertically proportioned window openings set within brickwork, with sandstone lintels and cills. However, elements of the ground floor frontage have been subject to unsympathetic alteration, including inconsistent finishes, poor-quality signage, and surface treatments which detract from the overall appearance.



Site existing elevation

3. Proposed Development

The proposal comprises:

- The conversion of one existing window opening into a new entrance door.
- Installation of a heritage black Crittall style glazed door with a fixed glazed top light.
- Retention of the existing structural opening
- Localised brick infill (using same salvaged bricks) to accommodate the revised door proportions.
- Repainting of the entrance and existing ground floor windows in a unified black finish.
- Associated minor improvements to the frontage, including cleaning and repair works.

Internally, the proposal facilitates the installation of a platform lift and stairs to address the level difference between the external pavement and internal floor level in an inclusive approach.

4. Amount of Intervention, and Options Exploration

The proposal represents a minor alteration to the existing building envelope, with no increase in footprint or overall scale.

The location of the entrance has been carefully selected following consideration of alternative options. More details are presented on a separate document and at the end of this statement. These included:

- Formation of a new or remodelled entrance from Hillcourt Street – discounted due to poor accessibility and inability to provide inclusive access.
- Introduction of an entrance at the centre of the Sidney Street elevation – discounted due to the impact on internal layout and commercial viability.
- Alternative positions along the frontage – discounted due to conflicts with adjoining units and operational constraints.

The chosen location utilises an existing window opening, thereby minimising intervention and avoiding the creation of new structural openings.

5. Design and Appearance

The design approach is informed by the industrial character of the host building and the need to maintain the rhythm and proportions of the existing façade.

Key principles include the retention of the original window opening proportions with minimal intervention to historic fabric. A visually lightweight insertion that reads as a continuation of the existing façade language is proposed.

The proposed entrance comprises a black glazed door with a fixed glazed top light. The top light aligns with the existing window proportions, maintaining vertical emphasis. The door sits below, creating a composition that reflects the original window hierarchy. Slim framing sections are proposed to reduce visual bulk and preserve transparency.

The design intentionally avoids a cheap door appearance and instead reflects a refined, industrial character appropriate to the building.

The proposed specifications are:

- Material: W20 steel system or heritage-grade aluminium system with steel sightlines to resemble Crittall style industrial heritage door.
- Finish: Polyester powder-coated, RAL 9005 (matt). The use of a black finish reflects traditional metalwork associated with industrial buildings and provides a recessive, neutral contrast to the brickwork.
- Glazing: Double glazed units with slim sightlines; clear glass.
- Frame depth: To match or sit comfortably within existing reveal depth.
- Ironmongery: Black metal finish; offset vertical pull handle (not centrally positioned), modest in scale.
- Threshold: Low-profile threshold coordinated with internal floor level and lift provision.

Brick infill: Salvaged bricks reused where possible to match existing. The mortar matched to existing in colour and composition. In relation to the stone cills, existing paint to be carefully removed and surfaces refurbished.

6. Heritage Considerations

The application property forms part of a traditional red brick building of clear industrial character, contributing positively to the surrounding townscape. While not statutorily listed, the building is considered a non-designated heritage asset due to its age, materiality, and retained architectural features. The proposal has been developed with careful regard to its significance.

The primary impact arises from the loss of one window opening and its conversion to a doorway. This is acknowledged as causing a low level of harm. However, the proposal mitigates this through:

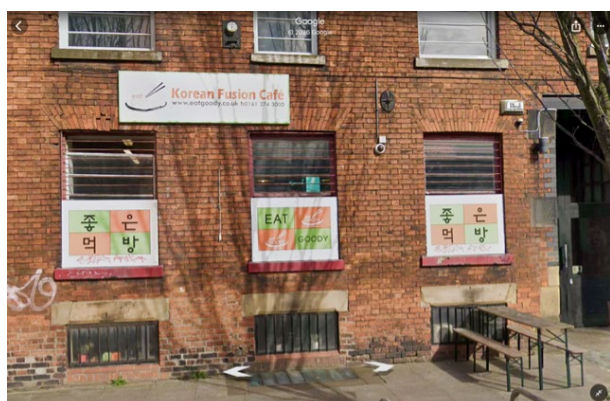
- Retention of the original opening dimensions.
- Avoidance of enlargement or structural alteration.
- Use of high-quality, sympathetic materials.
- Reinstatement of a coherent façade treatment.

Furthermore, the proposal results in enhancements to the building through:

- Removal of inappropriate finishes (e.g. red paint to stonework).
- Improved visual consistency across the ground floor.
- General repair and cleaning of the façade.



Existing and proposed side elevation



Existing and proposed front elevation

On balance, the level of harm is considered to be less than substantial and is outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme.

7. Access

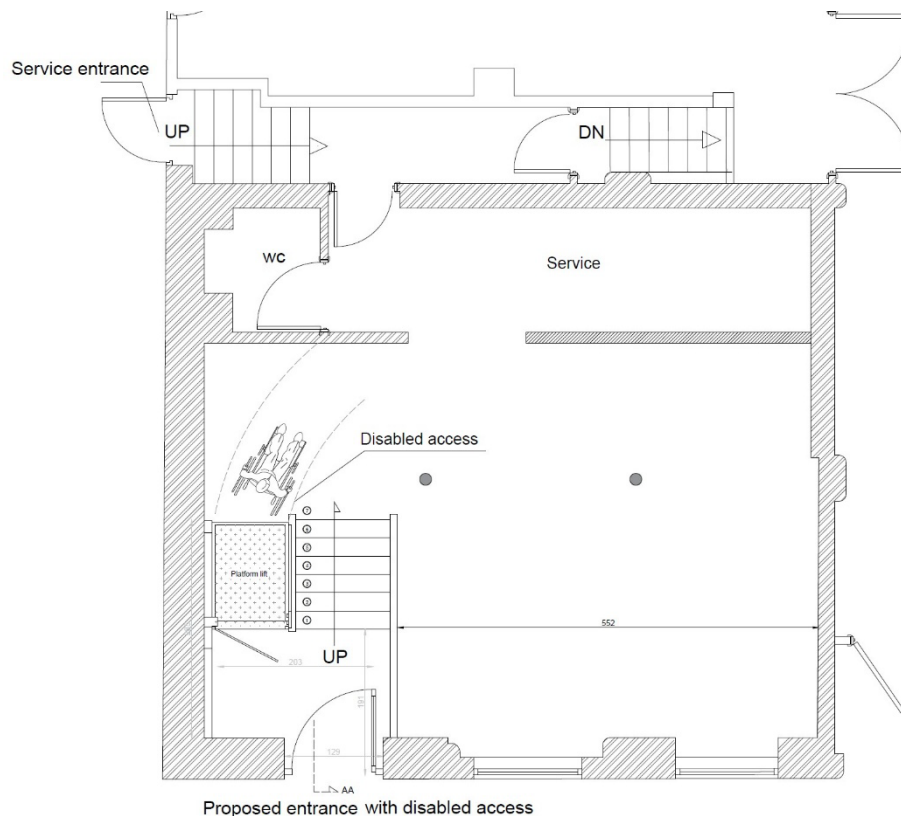
Existing Situation

At present, the unit does not provide inclusive access. The internal floor level is significantly higher than the adjacent pavement level, resulting in stepped access that prevents entry by wheelchair users and presents challenges for those with limited mobility. This represents a clear barrier to accessibility and limits the usability of the building as a publicly accessible commercial unit.

Proposed Approach

Improving accessibility has been a key driver in the development of the proposal. A range of alternative access arrangements were considered, including access from Hillcourt Street and alternative entrance positions along the principal elevation. These options were discounted due to their inability to deliver a practical and inclusive solution, particularly for wheelchair users.

The selected approach—forming a new entrance within an existing window opening on Sidney Street with a platform lift inside—represents the only viable solution that enables inclusive access while minimising impact on the building’s historic fabric.



The proposal introduces a clear and legible entrance at street level, combined with internal measures to overcome the level change. Key elements include:

- A step-free threshold at the entrance point
- A door width suitable for wheelchair access
- Installation of an internal platform lift to address the level difference between entrance level and internal floor level
- A logical and direct route into the unit, avoiding convoluted or secondary access arrangements

This approach ensures that wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility can access the premises in a manner that is safe, dignified, and equivalent to other users.

The scheme has been developed in accordance with inclusive design principles, including those set out in BS 8300, with the aim of:

- Providing equitable access for all users
- Integrating accessibility within the primary entrance (rather than secondary or rear access)
- Minimising physical and visual barriers
- Delivering a solution that is practical within the constraints of an existing heritage building

The provision of inclusive access represents a significant public benefit. While the proposal results in a minor level of heritage harm through the alteration of an existing window opening, this harm is clearly outweighed by the benefit of making the building accessible to a wider range of users.

The scheme therefore aligns with national and local planning objectives to promote inclusive environments while conserving heritage assets in a proportionate manner.

8. Other Considerations

Basement Windows

The existing basement windows to the right of the door have been reviewed and will be retained as part of this application. These will be cleaned, repaired, and repainted to improve their appearance.

Plant and Equipment

No new external plant, extraction equipment, or louvres are proposed as part of this application. Any future requirements would be subject to a separate planning application.

9. Conclusion

In accordance with national planning policy, the identified less-than-substantial harm must be weighed against public benefits. The proposed development represents a carefully considered and proportionate intervention that responds directly to previous feedback and pre-application discussions.

The scheme:

- Minimises impact on the building's heritage significance.
- Enhances the appearance of the existing frontage.
- Delivers meaningful public benefit through improved accessibility.
- Utilises high-quality, sympathetic materials and detailing.

It is therefore considered that the proposal strikes an appropriate balance between conservation and functionality and should be supported.

The proposal delivers clear public benefits through:

- Provision of inclusive, step-free access
- Enhanced usability of the building for a range of commercial uses
- Improvement to the visual quality of the frontage

On balance, it is considered that the public benefits outweigh the identified low level of harm, and the proposal represents an appropriate and sensitive intervention.

Appendix

OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Consideration of Alternative Access Arrangements

A range of alternative options have been explored as part of the design development process to identify the most appropriate location and form of access. A separate file has been supplied to support the following optioneering process:

Option 1: Access from Hillcourt Street

The creation of a new or remodelled entrance from Hillcourt Street was considered. However, this option was discounted due to:

- The inability to provide a compliant or practical accessible route for disabled users
- Existing level differences and spatial constraints
- Reduced prominence and legibility of the entrance

This option was therefore not considered feasible in terms of inclusive access.

Option 2: Central Entrance on Sidney Street Elevation

The insertion of a new entrance at the centre of the primary elevation was explored. This option was discounted due to:

- Significant disruption to the internal layout
- Division of the unit into two separate and inefficient spaces
- Adverse impact on the commercial viability of the unit

Option 3: Alternative Openings Along the Frontage

Other potential positions along the frontage were considered. These were discounted due to:

- Conflicts with adjoining commercial units
- Structural and spatial constraints
- Inconsistent relationship with the existing façade rhythm

Option 4: Conversion of Existing Window Opening (Proposed Scheme)

The selected option utilises an existing window opening to form the new entrance.

This approach:

- Minimises intervention to historic fabric
- Retains the established structural rhythm of the façade
- Avoids the need for new structural openings
- Allows for a sympathetic and reversible insertion
- Enables the provision of inclusive access

Conclusion of Options Appraisal

The proposed solution represents the most balanced and appropriate approach, successfully reconciling:

- Heritage sensitivity
- Accessibility requirements

- Commercial functionality
- Visual coherence of the building

It is therefore considered the optimum design response to the constraints and opportunities of the site.