

Design and Access Statement

Neptune Mill and Crusader Mill – Murals and Signage

Picadilly East, Manchester

Capital&Centric

December 2025

1. Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a retrospective planning application for the installation of two murals and one item of building signage within the Piccadilly East neighbourhood, Manchester. The address for the proposed murals and signage is:

64 Chapeltown Street,
Piccadilly East,
Manchester,
M1 2WQ

The proposals comprise:

- One complete mural on the courtyard-facing elevation of Crusader Mill
- One complete mural on the courtyard-facing elevation of Neptune Mill
- One proposed item of building signage reading “*Neptune Mill*” on the Neptune Mill elevation

The murals were installed in 2025 as part of Capital&Centric’s wider placemaking and regeneration strategy for Piccadilly East, an emerging mixed-use neighbourhood characterised by retained historic mill buildings, new residential development and active ground-floor uses. The signage is proposed as a refined and policy-compliant alternative to a previously considered large-scale mural on the same elevation.

2. Site and Context

Neptune Mill and Crusader Mill are retained historic mill buildings located within Piccadilly East, an emerging mixed-use neighbourhood on the eastern edge of Manchester city centre. They were developed by Capital & Centric, who are now a tenant of the Neptune Mill building.

- Neptune Mill is a converted mill building providing high-quality employment space and is currently occupied by a range of well-respected creative and commercial businesses, including The Warehouse Project, Tixstock, and the engineering consultancy Crookes Walker. Capital & Centric also occupy the ground floor office of the building. These occupiers contribute to Piccadilly East’s growing reputation as a creative, cultural and professional hub.

- Crusader Mill is a converted residential building that forms part of the established for-sale residential offer within the neighbourhood. The scheme was intentionally designed to prioritise owner-occupiers and long-term residents, with investors prohibited from purchasing units. This created a stable, lived-in community rather than a transient, investor-led development.
- Between the two buildings is a landscaped courtyard space, designed as a welcoming pedestrian environment and a focal point for activity within the neighbourhood.

Cotton Café currently acts as the principal food and beverage use within Piccadilly East, and the courtyard is a key public-facing space intended to attract footfall, encourage dwell time and support social interaction.

3. Design Amount, Layout and Scale

Murals (Retrospective)

The completed murals are located on courtyard-facing elevations of Neptune Mill and Crusader Mill. Each mural has been carefully positioned within existing brickwork openings to ensure:

- The scale remains proportionate to the host building
- The artworks do not dominate or obscure architectural features
- The historic character and legibility of the mill buildings is preserved

The murals do not result in any change to the buildings' massing, fenestration or structural form.



Figure 1: Neptune Mural (300x210cm)

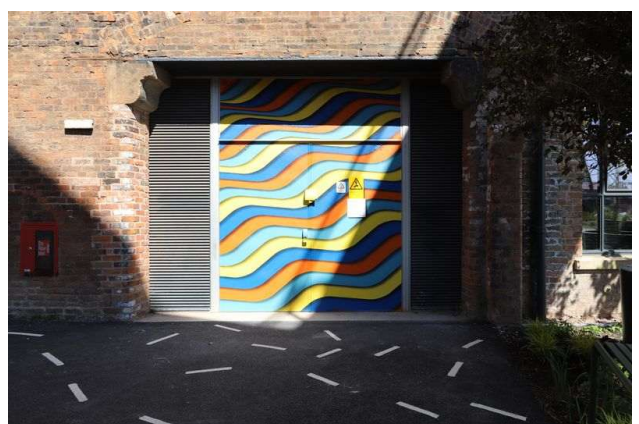


Figure 2: Crusader Mural (310x270cm)

Signage (Proposed)

The Neptune Mill signage is proposed but not yet installed. Its scale and positioning have been carefully designed to achieve a clear and legible identity for the building while remaining visually restrained and subordinate to the historic façade.

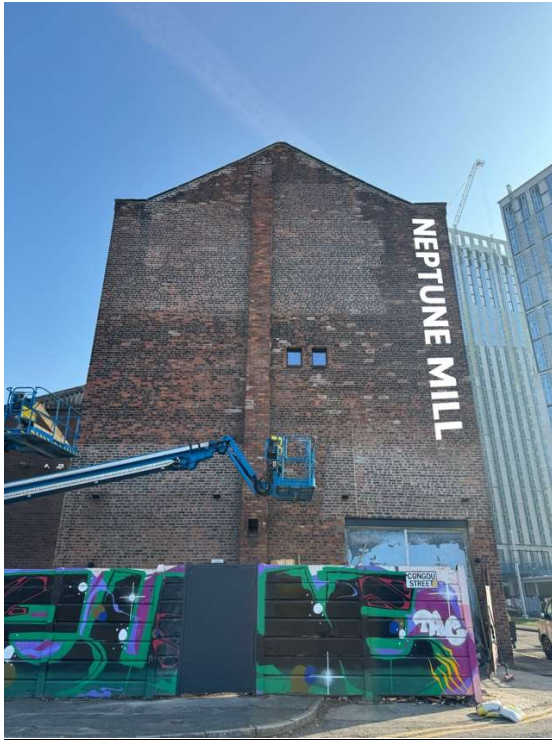


Figure 3: CGI of Neptune Signage (750cm tall)

4. Appearance and Materials

Murals

Both murals were designed and painted by Rob Lee, a Sheffield-based artist recognised for high-quality contemporary urban artworks that respond to industrial contexts.

The murals are painted directly onto the existing brickwork using Belton Molotow Premium spray paint. This is a professional-grade, UV-resistant external paint. The paint system is reversible, allowing the brickwork to be returned to its original appearance without permanent harm. The artwork introduces colour, vibrancy and identity while complementing the industrial heritage of the surrounding buildings.

Signage

The proposed Neptune Mill signage has been designed as a restrained and high-quality intervention, following the evolution of earlier design concepts. A previously considered large-scale mural on the outer-facing elevation was replaced with this more modest signage approach to ensure compliance with established guidance on visual amenity and signage design.

5. Design Rationale and Response to Context

The murals and signage form part of a coordinated placemaking strategy for Piccadilly East, responding positively to their setting by:

- Activating otherwise blank or inactive façades
- Reinforcing Piccadilly East as a creative, culture-led neighbourhood
- Enhancing the courtyard as a welcoming and sociable public space
- Supporting footfall and dwell time around Cotton Café
- Providing subtle wayfinding and visual cues within the neighbourhood

The proposed Neptune Mill signage also performs an important identity and legibility function. The signage follows the same simple, restrained design approach used across other Capital&Centric developments, creating a consistent and recognisable family of buildings without relying on excessive branding or visually dominant features. This consistency supports clarity, familiarity and ease of navigation for visitors, occupiers and service users.

Together, the murals and signage celebrate the area's industrial heritage while contributing to a contemporary, cohesive identity appropriate for an emerging city centre location.

6. Access Considerations

The proposals do not result in any changes to:

- Pedestrian or vehicular access
- Building entrances or thresholds
- Servicing or emergency access arrangements
- Existing routes through the courtyard or surrounding streets

The murals are visible from existing accessible pedestrian routes and can be enjoyed equally by all users, including those with mobility impairments. The proposed signage will similarly be visible from accessible routes and will not obstruct movement or sightlines.

Installation of the proposed signage can be undertaken without disruption to access or public safety.

7. Heritage and Townscape Impact

The murals and proposed signage have been carefully designed to preserve and respect the architectural and historic interest of Neptune Mill and Crusader Mill. No alterations have been made, or are proposed, to the buildings' original architectural detailing, structural form or historic fabric. The murals have been applied directly onto existing brickwork surfaces using a reversible paint system, ensuring that the underlying materials can be returned to their original appearance in the future without permanent impact. This approach allows the buildings' heritage significance to be retained while accommodating contemporary cultural expression in a sensitive and proportionate manner.

The scale, placement and visual weight of the murals have been deliberately controlled to ensure that they do not compete with, obscure or overwhelm key architectural features of the mill façades. Instead, the artworks sit comfortably within existing openings and secondary elevations, maintaining a clear visual hierarchy in which the historic fabric remains the dominant element. The proposed Neptune Mill signage has similarly been conceived as a modest and restrained intervention, providing necessary legibility and identity while remaining clearly subordinate to the host building.

The courtyard-facing location of the murals and signage further ensures that their impact is contained to the immediate pedestrian environment, where they contribute positively to the experience of residents, workers and visitors using the space. By avoiding prominent outward-facing elevations, the proposals do not adversely affect wider townscape views or the setting of surrounding heritage assets. Collectively, the murals and signage enhance the character and animation of the courtyard without causing harm to the historic significance or visual integrity of Piccadilly East's retained mill buildings.

8. Conclusion

This application seeks to regularise the completed murals at Neptune Mill and Crusader Mill through retrospective planning permission and to secure approval for the proposed Neptune Mill signage prior to installation.

The completed murals and proposed signage represent a thoughtful, design-led response to their context, enhancing visual interest, strengthening local identity and supporting wider regeneration and placemaking objectives within Piccadilly East. The proposals respect the historic character of the buildings, maintain inclusive access and contribute positively to the quality of the public realm.

