Design & Access Statement

Practice: Building Design Services

December 2025



Address: 1 Hillcourt Street, Manchester, M1 7HU

Proposed: Proposed Alteration to Existing Elevation Including Formation of New Entrance Door

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application for minor elevational alterations at 1 Hillcourt Street, Manchester, M1 7HU. The proposal involves the removal of an existing ground floor window on the Sidney Street elevation and the installation of a new entrance door in its place, together with associated internal works to create a small landing and improve access to the commercial unit.

1.2 The purpose of the proposed alteration is to provide a dedicated and independent entrance for the existing commercial premises, enabling improved operational efficiency and clearer separation between customer access and internal circulation. The works represent a modest intervention within an existing opening and do not affect the building's scale, massing, or upper façade.

1.3 Although the building is not statutorily listed and lies outside a Conservation Area, Manchester City Council has identified it as a non-designated heritage asset. This Design and Access Statement should therefore be read alongside the accompanying Heritage Statement, which demonstrates that the proposal is respectful, proportionate, and consistent with the building's modest heritage significance.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The application site lies on the corner of Hillcourt Street and Sidney Street, within a mixed-use urban area close to Grosvenor Street in central Manchester. The surroundings comprise a combination of commercial ground-floor units, student accommodation, modern infill developments, and retained early twentieth century brick buildings. This varied architectural context reflects the incremental redevelopment of the area over recent decades.

2.2 The building itself is modest in scale and traditional in appearance, featuring a red brick façade with a simple and coherent arrangement of window openings. Despite the presence of more contemporary buildings in the wider area, the property contributes positively to the established streetscape through its continuous building line, traditional proportions, and understated commercial character. The affected elevation fronts Sidney Street, where the existing ground floor window sits within an orderly pattern of openings.

2.3 The site is located outside any Conservation Area and is not subject to statutory heritage protection. However, the Local Planning Authority has identified the building as a non-designated heritage asset due to its coherent brick frontage and its contribution to the surrounding townscape. The immediate public realm consists of standard footways and carriageways with no features that would be impacted by the proposed works. The building remains visually integrated within the street, forming part of the established urban grain.

3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The proposal seeks full planning permission for the alteration of the ground floor Sidney Street elevation at 1 Hillcourt Street. The works comprise the replacement of two existing ground floor window openings with wider glazed window units and the replacement of a third existing ground floor window with a new aluminium entrance door to provide a dedicated independent access to the commercial unit. The alteration is accompanied by minor internal reconfiguration to form a small landing and adjusted stair arrangement immediately beyond the new entrance.

3.2 No changes are proposed to the upper-storey elevations, roof form, building height, footprint, or overall massing of the building. All external works are confined to the existing ground floor openings and are designed to sit within the established architectural framework of the host elevation. Materials and detailing for the widened windows and new entrance door will be selected to match or complement the existing red brick façade and surrounding architectural elements, ensuring a cohesive and sympathetic appearance. The proposal represents a modest but important functional improvement that enhances usability while preserving the building's architectural character.

4. INVOLVEMENT

4.1 The proposal has been developed by the applicant in response to the operational requirements of the existing commercial unit and the constraints of the host building. The design has been prepared with careful consideration of the building's status as a non-designated heritage asset, the surrounding townscape character, and the need to deliver a proportionate and functional improvement to the premises. Professional architectural and planning input has informed the scheme to ensure compliance with relevant national and local planning policy.

4.2 No formal pre-application discussions have been undertaken with the Local Planning Authority for this proposal. However, the applicant has sought to address all matters raised through the planning validation process, including the provision of a Design and Access Statement, Heritage Statement, disabled access justification, and detailed existing and proposed section drawings. The applicant remains willing to engage positively with the Local Planning Authority should any further clarification or minor amendments be required during the determination of the application.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

5.1 In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning applications must be determined in line with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For this proposal, the relevant policy framework includes the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Manchester Core Strategy (2012), both of which support well-designed, proportionate alterations that respect local character and preserve the contribution of heritage assets, including those of non-designated status.

5.2 The NPPF emphasises the importance of achieving high-quality design (Chapter 12) and requires that proposals affecting heritage assets are assessed in a proportionate and balanced manner (Section 16). Paragraph 203 states that the effect of a development on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account, with decisions based on the scale of harm relative to that significance. The proposed alteration is modest, localised, and designed to maintain the building's character, thereby fully complying with these national policy principles.

5.3 Relevant local policy is contained within the Manchester Core Strategy (2012). Policy DM1 requires development to demonstrate high-quality design that responds appropriately to its context, while Policy EN3 seeks to conserve and enhance the city's heritage assets, including those of non-designated status. The proposal respects the established façade composition, retains the building's overall form, and introduces a functional improvement without altering key architectural features, thereby aligning with the requirements of both DM1 and EN3.

6. DESIGN JUSTIFICATION

6.1 The proposed alterations have been designed to ensure that the character and appearance of the existing building are preserved. The replacement of two existing ground floor window openings with wider glazed units and the formation of a new aluminium entrance door have been carefully considered to maintain the established façade rhythm and proportions. The works are limited entirely to the ground floor, retain the original building line, and do not affect any upper-storey features, which represent the most sensitive and visually prominent elements of the elevation.

6.2 The intervention is deliberately minimal and focused on the adaptation of existing openings, rather than the creation of new structural breaks within the façade. The widened windows sit within the existing architectural framework of the elevation and are designed to retain a strong vertical emphasis. The new entrance door will be formed in aluminium, with materials, colour, and detailing selected to match or complement the surrounding red brickwork and existing joinery. This ensures a seamless visual integration with the host building while enhancing the commercial functionality of the premises.

6.3 The proposal represents the least intrusive means of achieving the required functional improvements. Alternative options were considered, including the creation of additional openings elsewhere on the façade or reconfiguration of the upper storeys; however, these were discounted as they would have introduced unnecessary disruption to the building's established form and greater impact on its modest heritage significance. Reusing and adapting the existing ground floor window positions ensures the intervention remains sympathetic, proportionate, and fully aligned with best practice for alterations to non-designated heritage assets, while delivering clear operational benefits.

7. ACCESS

7.1 The proposed works will improve access to the commercial unit by providing a dedicated and clearly identifiable entrance directly from Sidney Street. This enhances the legibility of the building and supports safer and more efficient movement for customers and staff. Immediately beyond the new aluminium entrance door, the existing internal arrangement includes a retained level change, with the finished floor level of the unit sitting above the external pavement level. The formation of a small landing and the adjusted internal stair arrangement will further improve circulation within the premises and allow safe and direct access to the commercial accommodation.

7.2 Due to the historic nature of the building and the retained internal floor level arrangement, it is not possible to achieve full permanent level access without significant and disproportionate structural alteration to the external fabric and internal layout of the building.

7.3 A number of options were considered in order to provide permanent level access, including the introduction of an external ramp, internal ramped access, and regrading of the internal floor level. These options were discounted due to the limited width of the external footway along Sidney Street, the constrained internal configuration of the premises, and the unacceptable level of intervention that would be required to the historic fabric of this non-designated heritage asset.

7.4 As a proportionate alternative, a portable wheelchair access ramp will be provided and deployed by staff where required to assist customers with mobility impairments in overcoming the internal level change at the entrance. This managed assisted-access arrangement ensures that reasonable adjustments are made in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, while preserving the structural and heritage integrity of the building.

7.5 The proposal does not alter the external public realm, building line, or pedestrian routes along Sidney Street. All works remain entirely within the site boundary and will not impact footway width or access to neighbouring premises. The new entrance arrangement provides greater clarity and convenience without introducing any barriers to movement or affecting highway safety.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 The proposed development represents a modest, well-considered alteration to an existing commercial building within a mixed urban area. The replacement of two existing ground floor windows with wider glazed openings and the installation of a new aluminium entrance door have been carefully designed to respect the character, proportions, and materiality of the host property. The introduction of a dedicated independent entrance, together with the internal formation of a small landing and stair arrangement, will improve circulation and enhance the overall functionality of the commercial unit, while ensuring the building continues to make a positive contribution to the surrounding streetscape.

8.2 The proposal improves the usability and operational efficiency of the commercial premises, accords with the relevant provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Manchester Core Strategy, and preserves the modest heritage significance of the non-designated heritage asset. The scheme also incorporates a managed assisted-access solution, including the provision of a portable wheelchair access ramp operated by staff, ensuring reasonable adjustments are made in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The development is proportionate, sensitive, and appropriate for its context, and it is therefore respectfully requested that the Local Planning Authority supports the application.