Heritage Strategy: Interpretation of the cultural and heritage interest of the Hotspur Press site



Prepared for: **Manner**

December 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose

- This report explains the heritage led-strategy and decisions made as part of the proposal to reconstruct the external elevations of the former mill building in new materials as part of the redevelopment of the Hotspur Press site.

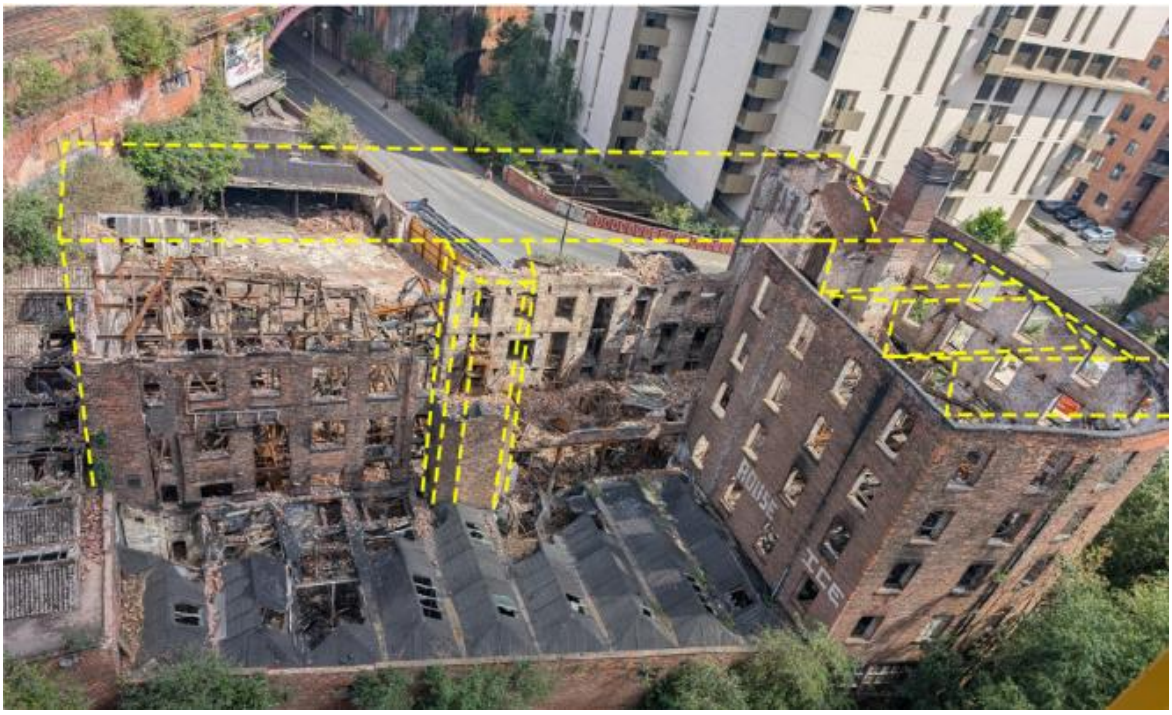
- The undetermined planning application submission for the Hotspur Press site ref: 138805/FO/2023 proposed residential redevelopment of the Hotspur Press but following a fire in June 2025 at the site these proposals need to be revised.

- This report accompanies the revisions to the planning submission for proposals to redevelop the Hotspur Press site.

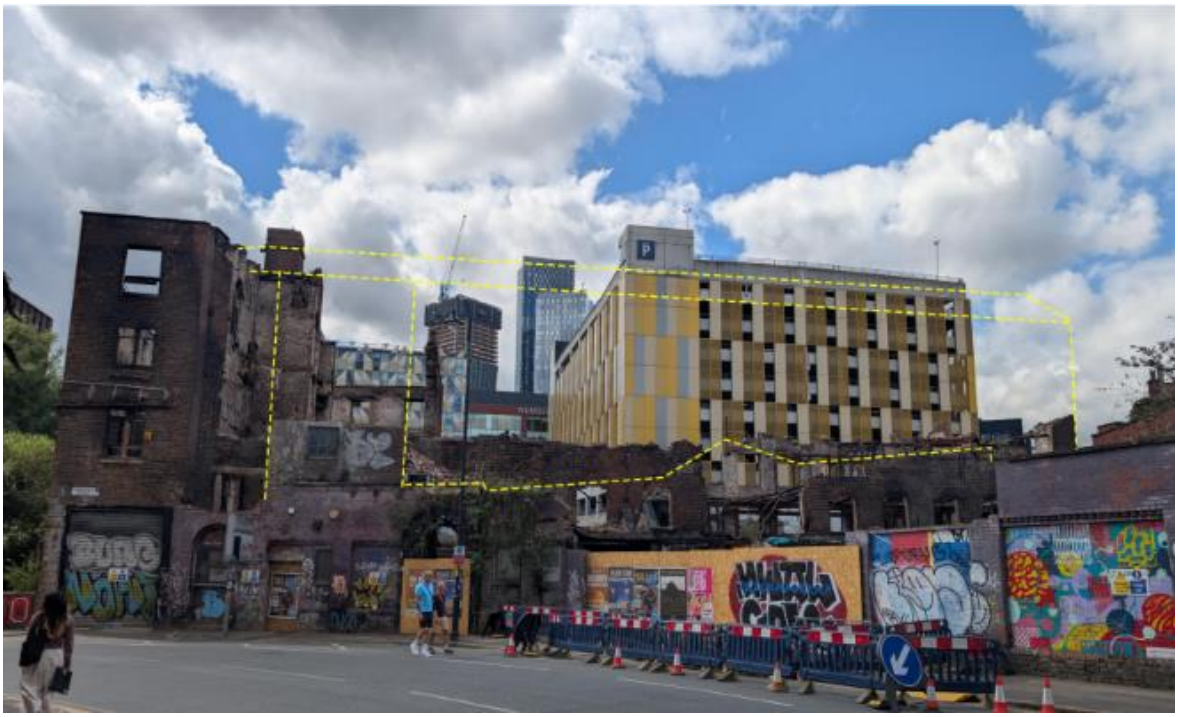
- Following the fire significant parts of the site have either collapsed or have been removed following notices issued by Building Control at Manchester City Council. These initial measures were necessary to make the site safe to allow the reopening of Cambridge Street.

- Despite these initial measures, the remaining structures within the site are still in a state of collapse which means the site is very dangerous and completely inaccessible.

- Due to the presence of asbestos, the building material within the site is contaminated. This poses extreme challenges of how to make the site safe, limits the potential for reusing the remaining historic fabric, and affects what can be done to remediate the site.



^ Figure 1: Aerial image of the Site after the fire. The yellow doted lines illustrate the extent of the structures lost (Source: Hodder + Partners).



^ Figure 2: Image of the former east elevation of the Site after the fire. The yellow dotted lines illustrate the extent of the structure lost (Source: Hodder + Partners).

- This report explains what has been considered as part of the design development for the revised proposals for the site following the fire.

- Key considerations have been:

    - The heritage interest of the site
    - The structural condition of the site
    - Public safety
    - Bringing the site back into active use
    - Enhancing the access and connectivity of the site

- Manner, who are the applicants for the proposed scheme, recognise the cultural value and heritage interest of this site and its place in Manchester's history; they are committed to ensuring that this is not lost because of the fire.

- Manner have requested the project team develop a scheme that not only reconstructs the external envelope of the former mill building on the same footprint, to the same height, form, mass and appearance as it was before the fire, but to ensure further measures are proposed to enable the historic importance of this site are understood for generations to come.

- Having been unused and derelict for over 10 years, a further objective of the revised proposals is to ensure the site is reactivated and provides high-quality publicly accessible spaces connecting it to the wider area.

1.2 The Heritage Status of the Hotspur Press

- Alongside the changes to the condition and surviving fabric of the Site, since the 2023 planning application was submitted, the heritage status of the site has been reviewed by Historic England and the Secretary of State at the DCMS.

- As a result of further research undertaken by Salford Archaeology in May 2024, Historic England assessed the Site for listing in June/ July 2024 and despite recommending it for listing, it was subsequently rejected by the Secretary of State on 30th January 2025 because they noted, "*that there remains uncertainty about the date of construction of the surviving fabric at Medlock Mill, and that for buildings from 1700 to 1850, while most buildings that retain a significant proportion of their original fabric are likely to be regarded as of special interest, some selection is necessary*."

- A review of this decision was subsequently requested by third parties but was not progressed due to the fire and the loss/ damage to the site.

- The site is not listed and is not within a conservation area, therefore it is not subject to the tenets of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Area) Act 1990.

- Hotspur Press has been identified by Manchester City Council as a non-designated heritage asset.

- Local planning authorities may identify buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes as "non-designated heritage assets" (NDHA). These sites are understood as having a degree of significance, which merits consideration in planning decisions, but are not formally designated heritage assets (i.e. listed). In some areas, local authorities identify non-designated heritage assets as 'locally listed'.

- Some non-designated heritage assets, such as buildings of good local character or sites of archaeological interest, are of heritage significance but not at a level that would pass the threshold for national designation (listing). Such assets can, singularly and collectively, make an important, positive contribution to the local environment. It is recognised that the historic interest of the Hotspur Site still makes a positive contribution to Manchester's industrial history, despite the damage caused by the recent fire.

  - **FOR MORE INFORMATION: see the *Heritage Statement*, by Heritage Architecture, provides a detailed history of the Site and explains the heritage designations referred to above.**

1.3 Structure of this report

- This report explains what is proposed as part of the redevelopment of the Hotspur Press site and why.

- The next section of this report explains the structural condition of the site following the fire and what needs to be considered in order to make the site safe.

- Section 3 of this report then details what has changed from the previous proposals and how the heritage interest of the site has informed the revised proposals.

- Section 4 details the additional proposals being made to ensure the heritage interest of the site is understood, appreciated and accessible to all.

2. The Site as it Exists Today

2.1 Overview

- The condition of the site post-fire is such that it is in a state of collapse and completely inaccessible.

- Normally sites in this condition would be demolished, cleared and redeveloped, but in recognition of the special heritage interest of the Hotspur Site it is proposed to reconstruct the former external envelope of the mill building and include proposals that tell the history of the site, making it active and vibrant and stitching it back into the urban form of Manchester.

- The first step in assessing how to reconstruct the former mill has been to assess the structural condition of the remaining structures within the site.

- Engineers at Civic have undertaken a Structural Appraisal of the remaining structures within the site which confirms they are in an extremely dangerous condition.

  ➢ **FOR MORE INFORMATION: refer to the *Structural Appraisal and Retention Strategy*, November 2025, by CIVIC**

- Of greatest immediate concern is the south wall of the former mill building which follows the curve of the River Medlock. Since the fire, and the loss of the internal floor structures, the remaining walls are unrestrained and there is evidence of a substantial crack and significant movement. The structural engineers have highlighted the high risk of this wall collapsing which poses a threat to safety as well as significant debris and contamination to the river.

- The condition and position of the south wall is such that it cannot be restrained/ propped temporarily due to site logistics; demolition and collapse material, as well as safe access due to the unstable nature of remaining structure, prevent installation of an internal or external façade retention solution.



^ Figure 3: photos illustrating the ongoing movement to the curved south wing of the Site. Image from November 2025 to left and June 2025 to the right (Source: Civic).



^Figure 4: Photo illustrating the cracking to the south elevation (November 2025. Source: Civic)

- The owner of the site and Manchester City Council have been notified of the perilous condition of the south wall.

- Setting aside the issue of the south wall of the site, the structural engineers at Civic have considered options for retaining the remaining standing structure and the measures that would be needed to do this.

- The challenges presented with how to safely take down the south wall are the same for the remaining structures within the site. In order to retain the existing facades, they would need to be restrained and supported externally, however in order to do this, substantial bridging structures over the river would need to be constructed and third party land would need to be accessed; Cambridge Street would also need to be closed. The challenging logistics, alongside the viability of doing this make this option undeliverable.

2.2 The need for demolition and rebuild

- There are two key changes to the proposals from those previously presented:

    1) It is no longer possible to retain parts of the existing external walls; the amount of demolition and collapse material around the walls, as well as safe access due to the unstable nature of remaining structure mean installing temporary restraints is undeliverable for logistical and viability reasons.

    2) It is no longer possible rebuild the external walls using the existing building materials due to the fire damage and contamination of them.

- In acknowledgment of the heritage interest of the site, and consistent with previous proposals, it is now proposed to reconstruct the former external elevations of the mill building on the same footprint, replicating its height, mass form and appearance with new materials.

- The previous proposals sought to retain the east and south walls of the former mill building and then rebuild the north elevation and palisade wall, which were to be dismantled to enable construction of the Proposed Development.

- Figure 5, below, illustrates the previous proposals. Areas of the façade shown in red (east) were to be retained via an external façade retention system, areas of the façade shown in blue (south) were to be retained via an internal façade retention system given the presence of the River Medlock. Areas of the façade shown in

yellow (north) were to be dismantled and rebuilt to facilitate construction activity, and areas of the façade shown in green (west) were to be dismantled and rebuilt.



^ **Figure 5:** Previous proposal retention strategy (Source: Civic)

- Clearly, the fire in June 2015 destroyed much of the site and has radically altered what needs to be done to remediate the site, as well as the need to modify the design of the proposals.

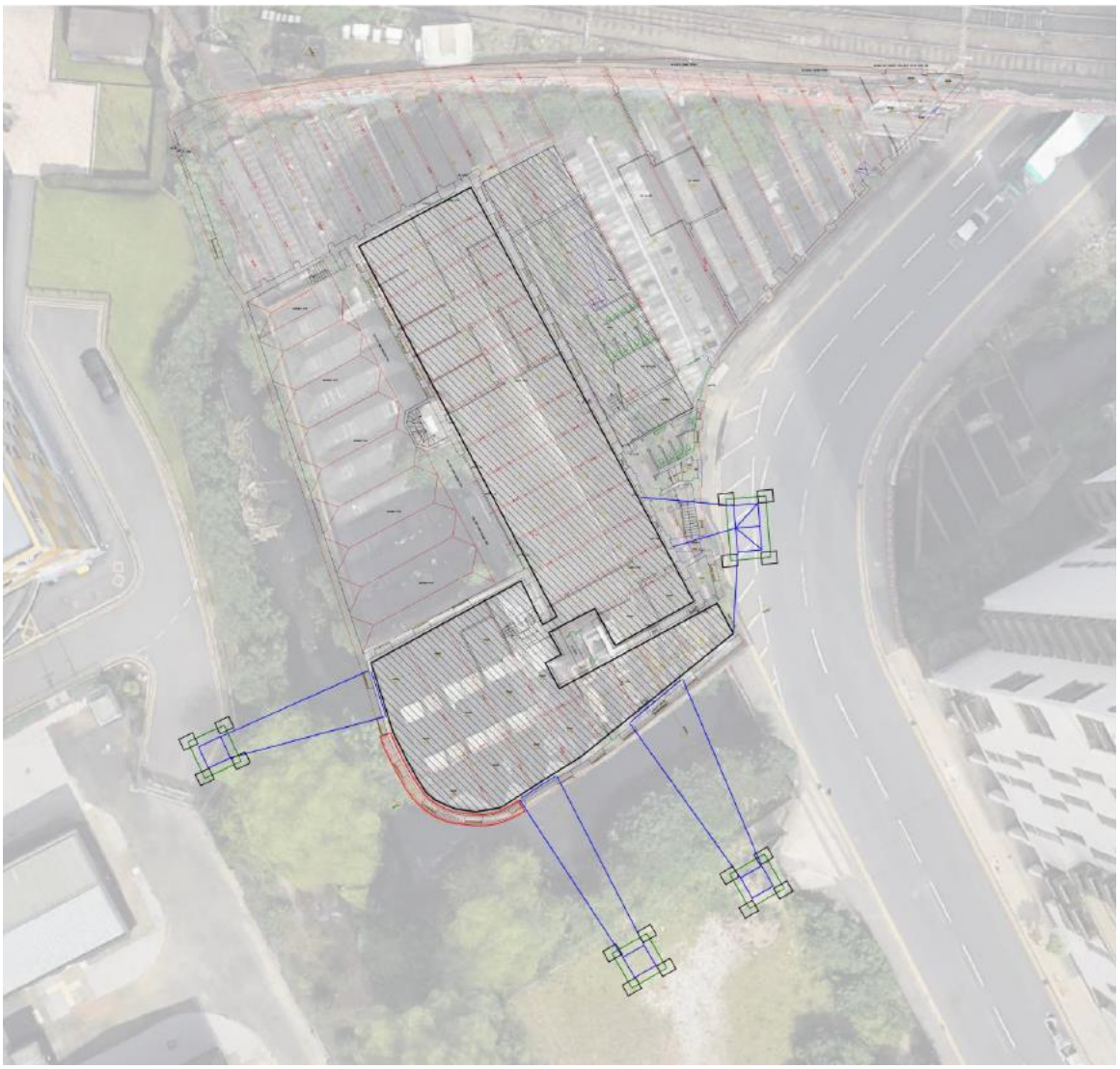
- Following the fire, assessment of the remaining structure has been undertaken by Civic Engineers and temporary works engineers, Swantons, to advise on the methods for making the site safe, clearing the site, and implementing the proposals. Having interrogated a number of options, it has been demonstrated that the site poses a number of constraints that result in the need for the remaining structures on the site to be demolished and the material removed from site due to its contamination.

- The site is heavily constrained being adjacent to the River Medlock, pedestrian footpaths, the road, and live train line. The site is now contaminated due to the

asbestos material within the former buildings being exposed. Further to this, the material on site is now fire damaged, water damaged and open to the elements.

- As highlighted in the reports by Civic and Swanton, the method for demolition is complicated requiring consideration for public safety and potential impact on third party land and the River Medlock. The structural condition of the remaining structures on site is such that it is not accessible and as a result, the only way to remove the remaining structures safely is by a long-reach machine.

- Due to the contamination of the site, the building material will be removed from site and tested. All hazardous material will be disposed of; material that is inert will be considered for reuse.



^ Figure 7: Option for temporary retention strategy that has been proven to be unfeasible due to the logistics and viability of the temporary works required (Civic).

Façade Reference	Previous Solution for Temporary Façade Retention	Appropriateness Since Fire	Alternative Option	Conclusion
North East Mill Façade	External Steel Frame	No internal access possible due to collapse and demolition debris. No external access possible due to collapse and demolition debris. No access available generally due to safety implications and unstable remaining structure.	No feasible option apparent to the north to implement façade retention structures. To the south external façade retention strategy is possible. Would require partial closure of Gloucester Street.	Closure of Gloucester Street likely to cause significant disruption to highway. Practicalities to be confirmed by Main Contractor and discussed with Manchester City Council, Manchester City Highways and asset holders in the highway, for instance telecoms, gas, electricity.
Southern Warehouse Façade	Internal Steel Frame	No internal access possible due to collapse and demolition debris. No external access possible due to River Medlock.	External façade retention strategy possible. Would require access to third party land and bridging structures over the River Medlock..	Agreement from third party land owners required. Agreement from Environment Agency required. Practicalities and safety considerations to be confirmed by Main Contractor.
North West Mill Façade	Dismantle and Rebuild	Appropriate	N/A	Façade to be dismantled and rebuilt.

^ **Figure 8**: Summary of façade retention options interrogated by Civic

2.3 Recording / Reuse of materials

- The site is currently too dangerous to access and due to the presence of asbestos, the existing building material is considered to be contaminated.

- There is currently approximately 2 metres of fallen masonry within the building. This, alongside the fire and water damage mean the possibility of being able to salvage any of the historic features of the building are unlikely.

- As described above, the remaining structures will need to be demolished by machine and the building material will be removed from site to be tested. If the material tests positive for contamination it will have to be disposed of. However, if any material tests negative for contamination there will be the opportunity for reusing this material within the redevelopment of the site.

- A condition of the planning application would ensure this strategy is complied with.

- If material can be reused, a suggested proposals for its reuse are presented in the report appended to this one by Lucid.

  ➢ **FOR MORE INFORMATION: See Section 4 of this report for further details of the heritage interpretation strategy, and Appendix 1 for Lucid's detailed proposals.**

- The constraints regarding the existing material mean it is not possible to reconstruct the former mill building with the original brick, however working alongside Imperial Bricks Ltd, and Hodder + Partners, Heritage Architecture have

advised on the selection of a new hand-made brick that is the same size, colour and texture as the original brick, in order to replicate the appearance of the former industrial building. Using a reclaimed brick was discounted due to the issues these can have regarding provenance as well as sourcing the required numbers.

3. Heritage led Design

3.1 Design considerations of the rebuild

- In acknowledgment of the heritage interest of the site, and as with previous proposals, it is proposed to reconstruct the former external elevations of the mill building on the same footprint, replicating its height, mass, form, and appearance.

- In developing a heritage-led strategy for the reconstruction, key design aspects of the original building were reviewed and discussed with Hodder + Partners in order to ensure an honest interpretation of the building that wasn't pastiche, acknowledging it would be a 'new build' structure and subject to modern building regulations etc.

- Key aspects that have been reproduced in the design for the rebuilding are:

    - **Brick** – using a new hand-made brick that is the same size, colour and texture as the original (Figure 9)

    - **Brick bonding** – replicating the historic brick bonds to different aspects of the building (Figure 10)

    - **Fenestration arrangement** – retaining the number and pattern of window openings (Figures 11-12)

    - **Windows**- replicating the historic multi-pane metal windows (Figures 11-12).

    - **Signage** – reinstating the 'Hotspur Press' and Percy Brothers Ltd' signage to the east elevation (Figure 13).

    - **Brick detailing** – replicating the relieving arches to the north elevation and dentil course/ parapet detail (Figure 12).

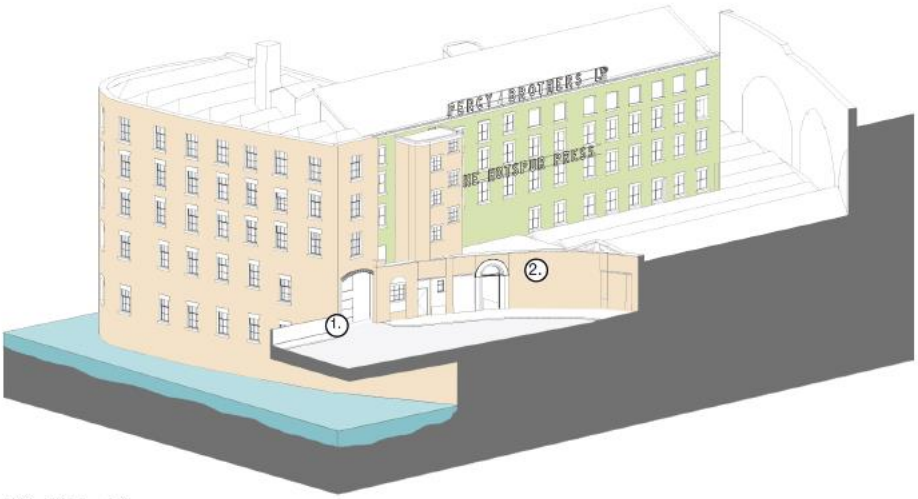
    - **Stone quoins** – reinstating stone quoins to the south-eastern corner/ entrance (Figure 13).

    - **Stone cills to windows** – replicating the historic stone cills (Figure 12).

- **The palisade wall** – replicating the former street wall (Figure 13)



^ **Figure 9:** Photograph illustrating the comparison between the proposed new hand-made brick and those taken from the remains of the Hotspur Press mill (existing brick highlighted in blue outline).

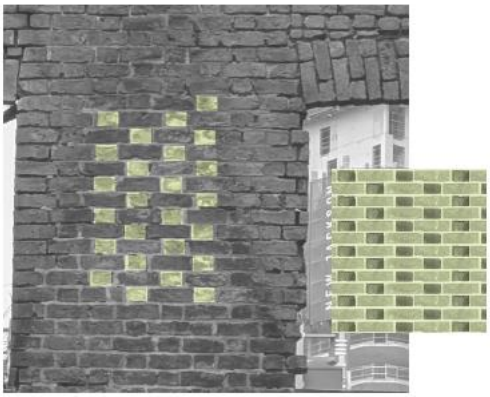


Existing brick bond diagram

1. Common Bond



2. Flemish Bond



^ Figure 10: The existing east elevation and south elevation were built using different types of brick bond. The diagrams highlight where Flemish and common bond brick courses are used.

Flemish Bond is a bricklaying pattern where each course of bricks alternates between a header (the short face) and a stretcher (the long face). Every header is centred over the stretcher in the course below, creating a distinctive and balanced checker board or decorative pattern on the wall's surface.

Common Bond is characterised by having a stretcher course (the long face) with a course of headers (the short face) inserted every five to six courses. The headers in each new course are centred over the stretchers in the courses below them to provide an interlocking tie between the front and back of the wall.

(Source: Hodders + Partners).

Fenestration Overlay - East Elevation



Fenestration Overlay - West Elevation



Fenestration Overlay - North Elevation



Fenestration Overlay - South Elevation



^ Figure 11: Images illustrating the minor changes to the revised proposals for the position of the window openings which allows for better floor to ceiling heights internally across the building (Source: Hodder + Partners).

The external walls of the former mill

- The facades of the former mill will be reconstructed in full down to river level. New windows that reflect the former historic fenestration pattern will be installed; the former 1950s extension to the east elevation will not be reinstated which will assist in restoring a sense of the original appearance of the elevation.

- As described above, specific details of the former building will be replicated in the new building to allow for the historic architectural form to be appreciated. This includes the use of a new hand-made brick that is the same size and colour as the historic brick, replicating historic brick bonding, incorporating brick detailing such as relieving arches to the north elevation and the dentil course/ parapet detail. The stone quoins to the south-eastern corner will be reinstated and replication of the historic stone cills will be made.

- New windows will be added to the rebuilt elevations that follow our understanding of the historic multi-paned window fenestration that would have existed originally.

- The original c1902 Percy Brothers signage is to be remade and reinstated as a key feature of the east elevation. Reinstating this feature will allow for the aesthetic and historic significance of the early 20th century history and use of the site to be appreciated.

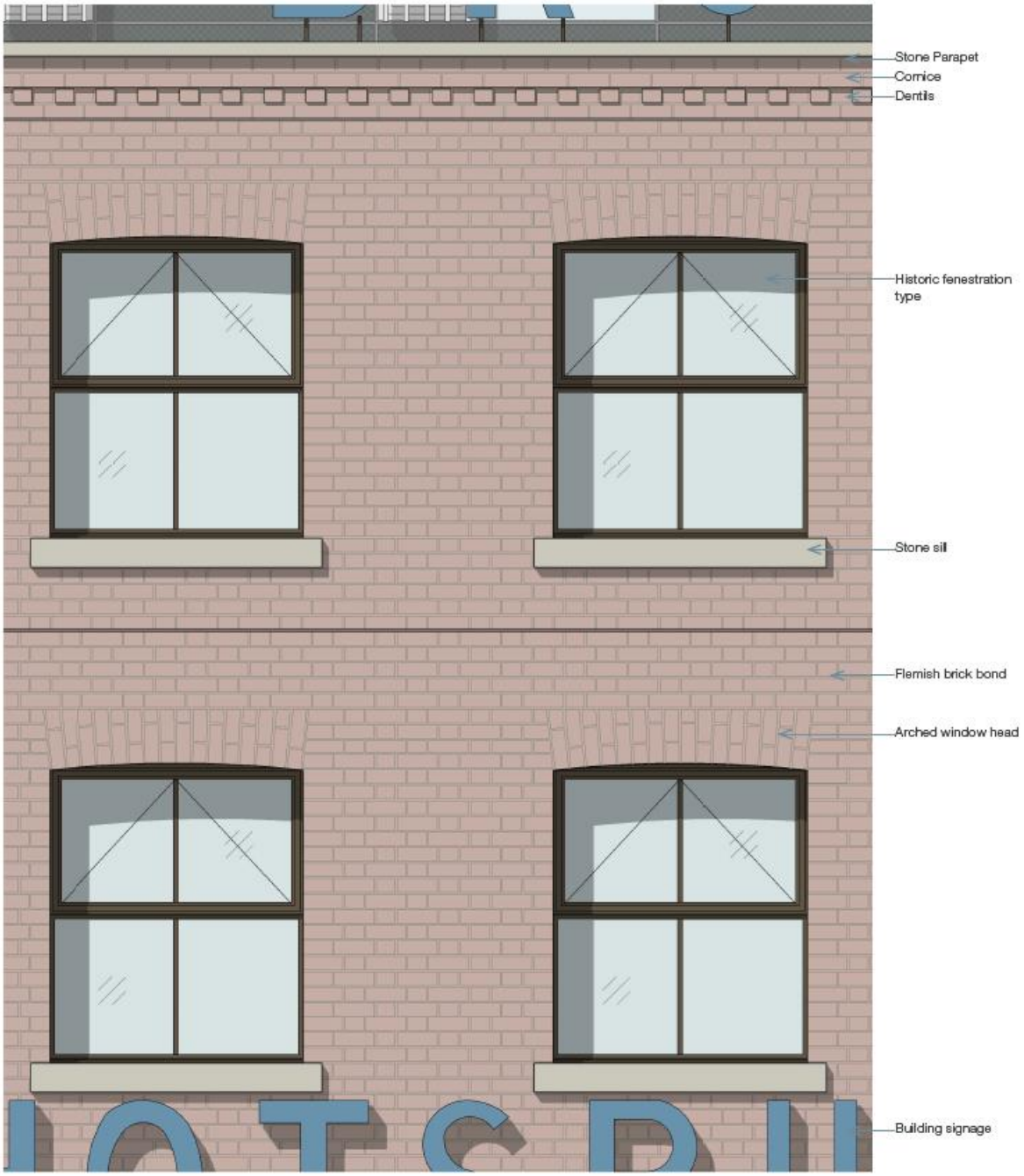
Palisade wall

- It is proposed to insert openings into the wall to allow for much needed visual and physical connection through to the northern end of the Site and into the First Street neighbourhood beyond.

Public realm

- The clearance of the area where the low level shed structures once stood across the Site will allow for the proposed high-quality public realm to be delivered enabling opportunities to understand and appreciate the remaining parts of the building and better reveal the site's heritage interest. These works will also allow for the first time in the Site's history for permeability through the Site integrating it with the First Street neighbourhood, revealing the Site's relationship with the river and the city beyond. Landscape proposals have been developed by McGregor Smith and Lucid and include a series of interpretative installations and public art proposals.

➢ **FOR MORE INFORMATION: See the *Design and Access Statement* by Hodders + Partners.**



^ Figure 12: Drawing detailing the replicated detail on the reconstructed east elevation (Source: Hodder + Partners).



^ Figure 13: Proposed CGI image illustrating the reconstructed east elevation and palisade wall. The historic "Percy Brothers" and "The Hotspur Press" signage will be remade and reinstated (Source: Ambiente).



^ Figure 14: Proposed CGI images illustrating the previous proposals (top) with the current revised proposals (bottom) demonstrating the subtle differences of the reconstructed elevations (Source: Ambiente).

4. Heritage Interpretation Proposals

4.1 Heritage Interpretation proposals

- A key aspect of the revised proposals for the site has been consideration of how the heritage interest of the site can be interpretated within the Proposed Development.

- Utilising the landscaping proposals by McGregor Smith, Lucid have produced an interpretation strategy which proposes a number of additional features that will allow for the understanding and appreciation of the heritage interest of the Site (see Appendix 1 for full details). Proposals are based around the key themes of:

    - *Arts and Culture*; reflecting the past uses of the site,
    - *Industrial Heritage*; celebrating the rich cultural heritage of the area and telling the stories of the built heritage and people, and
    - the *River Medlock*; celebrating this largely hidden asset.

- Proposals include:

    - Public art installations within the public realm which will celebrate, engage and educate, and include:

        - Art murals
        - Metalwork inlays
        - Etchings and engravings

    - Interpretative installations, including:

        - Wayfinding
        - Street furniture
        - Projections
        - Digital links/ mobile activated augmented reality

    - Potential creative businesses within the ground floor unit to the north of the site linked to the curation of temporary external installations and exhibitions in the external public realm.

- Potential reuse of existing features within the public realm design.

➢ **FOR MORE INFORMATION: See the *Public Art and Interpretation Report*, by Lucid, in Appendix 1 of this report.**





^ Figures 15 and 16: CGI images of the proposed landscaping to the Site (top) with an overlay of the type of interpretation measures proposed by Lucid that will reveal the historic interest of the site (bottom). (Source: McGregor Smith and Lucid).

5. Summary

- The Site at present is in extremely poor condition and requires significant investment to ensure its heritage interest is not completely lost. The proposals seek to provide a development that whilst viable, ensures the reinterpretation of the most significant parts of the site, delivering a scheme that will make a positive contribution to the vitality of this part of the city centre.

- The innovative hard and soft landscaping proposals by McGregor Smith and interpretative offer by Lucid will ensure for the first time in the Site's history that the historic interest of the Site will be accessible to all and will enable appreciation of the importance of the Site to the industrial history and development of Manchester.

- The interpretative installations and public art will result in activation of the public realm through projections, performances and technology. The objective of the proposals is to celebrate, engage and educate the public on the industrial history of the Site and the connection with the surrounding townscape.



^ Figure 17: Illustrative plan highlighting the pivotal location of Hotspur Press between heritage assets, cultural institutions, new developments and the hidden River Medlock

Appendices

Appendix I: Heritage Interpretation Proposals, Lucid

HOTSPUR PRESS

Public Art and Interpretation Report

November 2025

Document Number: L0075_100



Lucid
design studio


TRANSPENNINE
EXPRESS
BUNC
P019 MZO
DG21 VFK

Hotspur Press

Revision	Date	Description
Issue 01	18/11/2025	First issue
Issue 02	20/11/2025	Second issue with minor revisions

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1

Introduction

Introduction

1.1. Public Art and Interpretation Report

This report supplements the proposals for the public realm design of Hotspur Yard, in support of the detailed planning application.

On Monday 23rd June 2025, the original historical building suffered a devastating fire. The site remains with partial facades, most of which is significantly damaged and contaminated, if not lost entirely. However, this does not erase the rich history of the site and its surroundings or the local heritage and culture that exist in this part of the city.

This report will set out themes to inform the proposals for arts and interpretation interventions within the framework of the proposed public realm design. The report draws inspiration from the built and social heritage context to celebrate to history of the site and the memories of those generations of people that worked within the original walls and lived alongside Hotspur Press contributing to the evolution of Manchester.





2

Context

Context

2.1 Site Location

The application site is located on Gloucester Street, to the south of the city centre, bounded by the River Medlock to the south and the Liverpool-Manchester railway line to the north.

Beyond the immediate context, the nearby Rochdale Canal lies to the north, Oxford Road to the east and the Mancunian Way (A57M) to the south.

It sits within the context of three strategic regeneration framework areas: Oxford Road Corridor, First Street and Portland Street.

A number of arts and cultural venues are located within walking distance of the site including, HOME, the O2 Ritz, the Palace Theatre and the Bridgewater Hall.

Legend

- Application Boundary
- 1 Oxford Road Corridor SRF
- 2 First Street SRF
- Liverpool-Manchester Railway

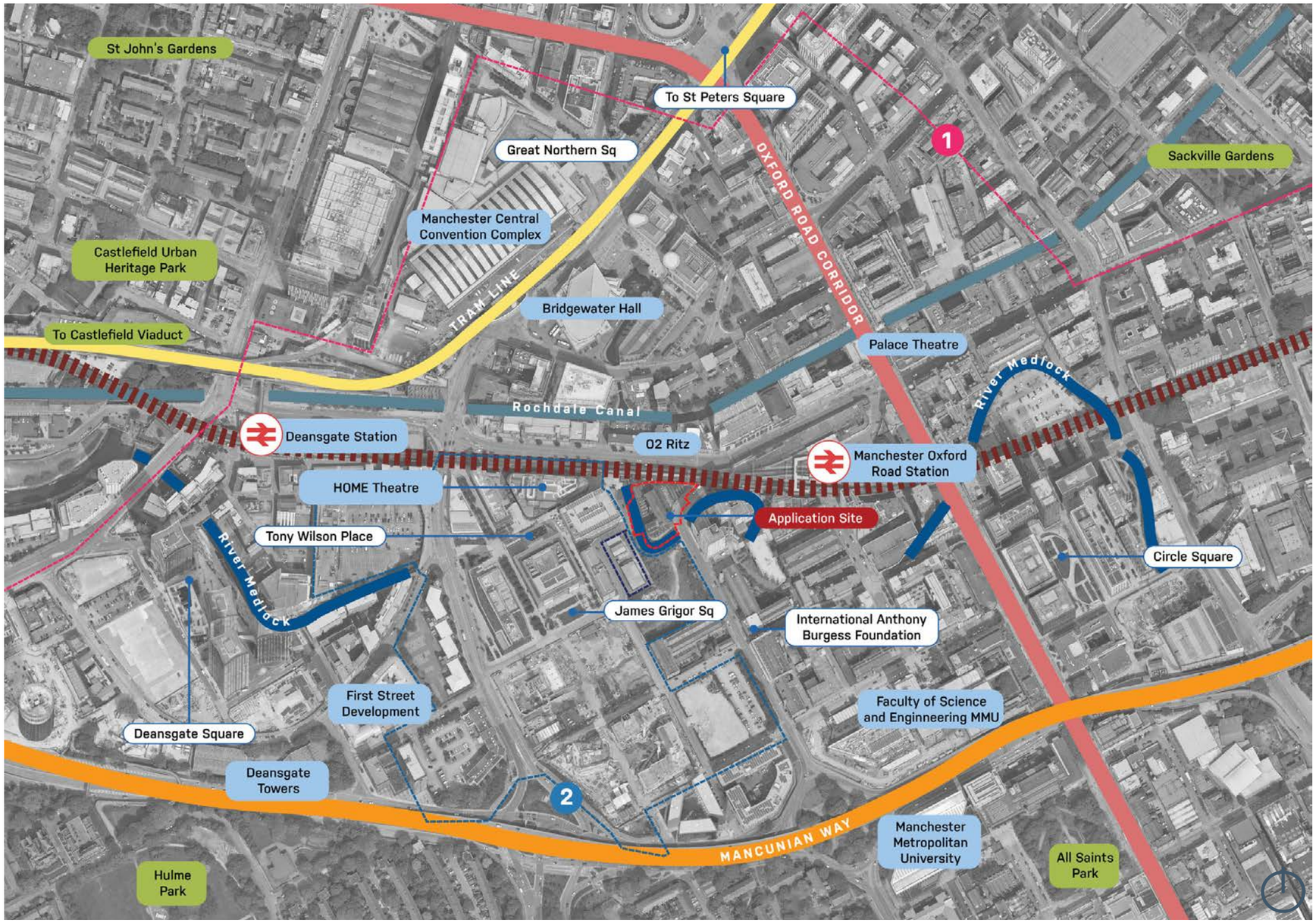


Figure 2.1: Plan of local context in relation to the site

Aerial base imagery © Google Earth 2025

Context

2.2. Site Context | Existing Site

The application site is located on Gloucester Street, which connects Cambridge Street with Whitworth Street West.

The existing railway viaduct runs along the northern boundary and the River Medlock along the south and west.

The majority of the existing application site is occupied by buildings including the historical mill, originally used as a textile mill and later by the printing company Percy Brothers.

These site buildings suffered significant damage in the recent fire.

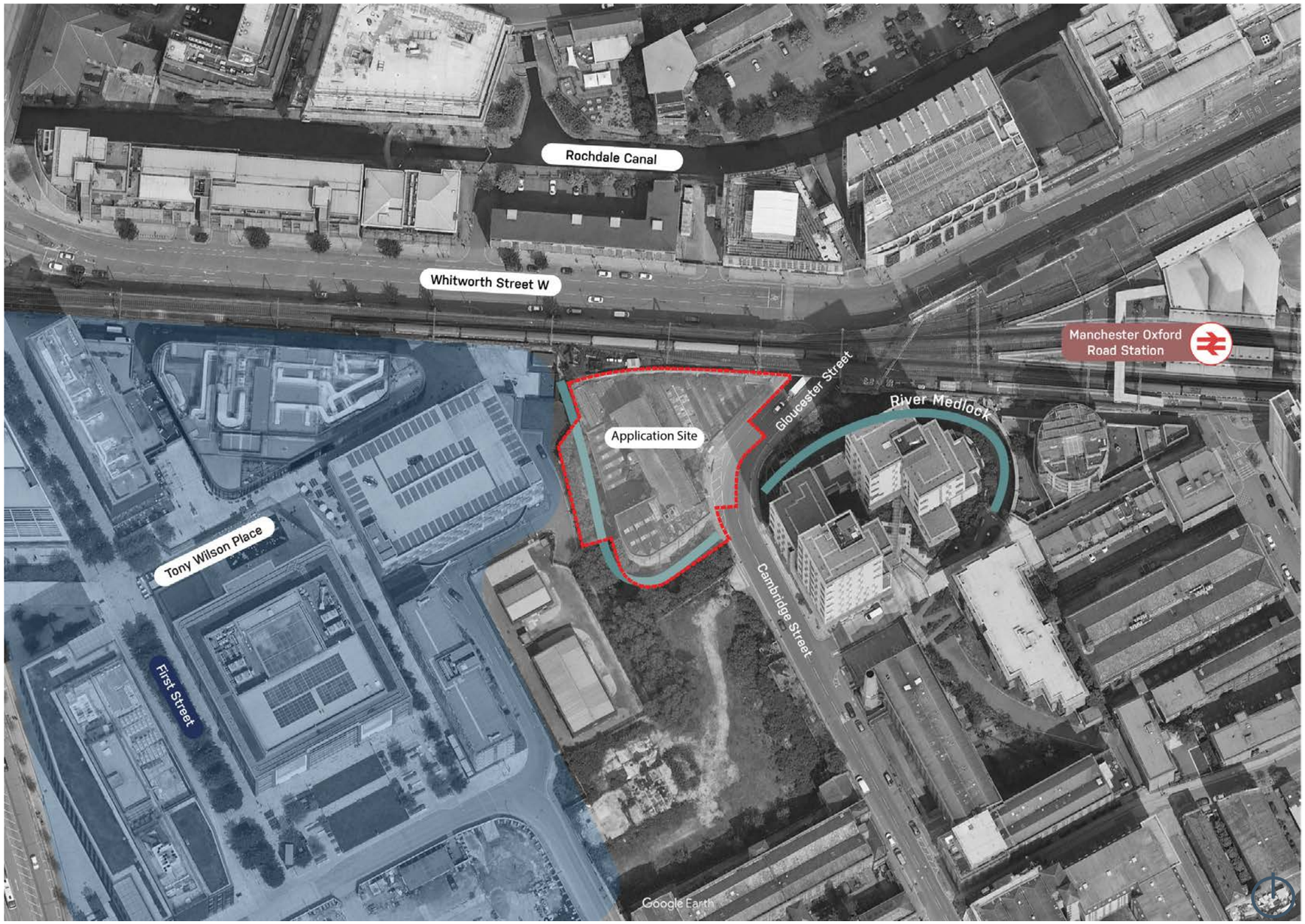


Figure 2.2: Plan of local context in relation to the site

Aerial base imagery © Google Earth 2025

Context

2.3. Site Context | Listed Buildings

The area surrounding the application site is rich in local heritage. There exists a number of historical buildings and structures across the area, including listed chimneys and the railway viaduct on the north side of the site.

---- Application Boundary

Railway Viaduct

Historical Buildings:
1. Hotspur Press

Listed Buildings:
2. Macintosh Mills & Chimney
3. Chorlton New Mill & Chimney
4. Chorlton Old Mill
5. Mill on NE corner of junction with Chester St
6. Chatham Mill
7. Oxford Rd Train Station
8. The Ritz Dance Hall
9. The Palace Theatre
10. Former Refuge Assurance Company Offices
11. Dancehouse Theatre
12. Albion St
13. The Britons Protection PH
14. Chepstow House
15. Pevril of the Peak PH
16. Lee House
17. Tootal, Broadhurst and Lee
18. Bridgewater House

19. Associated Listed Mill Chimney

Historical Areas:
19.Little Ireland
20.The Old Gasworks

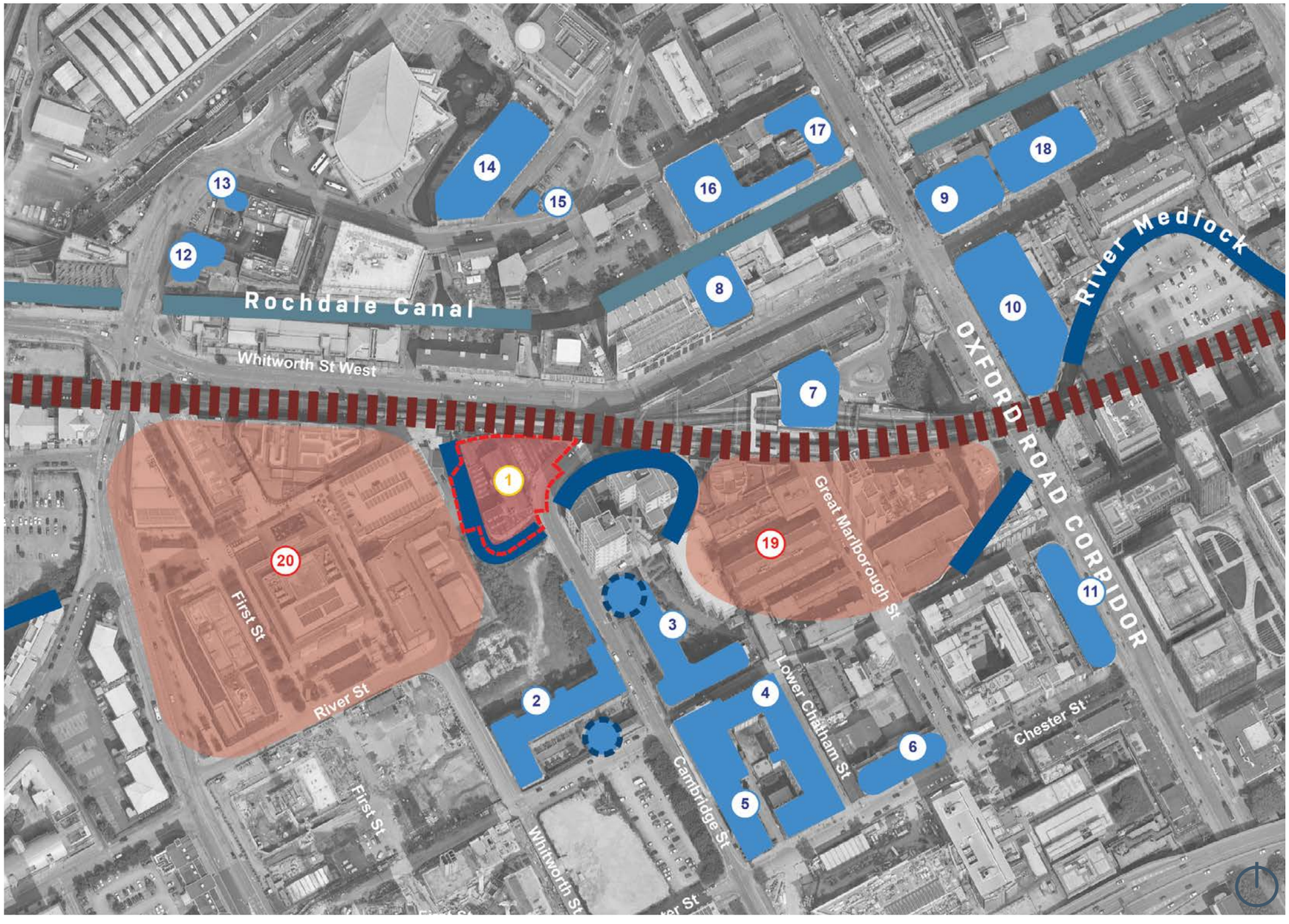


Figure 2.3: Plan of local context in relation to the site

Aerial base imagery © Google Earth 2025

Context

2.4. Site Context | History

The area surrounding the Hotspur Press application site and the wider area between Cambridge Street and Oxford Road, has a unique history within to the story of Manchester.

Its industrial heritage is visible in the striking mill buildings that are still present, but it is interesting to also consider the many hidden stories and collective memories associated with the place.

"Little Ireland", one of the most deprived areas of the city between 1827 and 1847.

ORDINARY PEOPLE
THE FORGOTTEN STORY OF LILY MAXWELL AND HER LINK TO THE SUFRAGETTE MOVEMENT...

LILY MAXWELL: Britain's first ever female voter and Manchester shop keeper



Lily Maxwell worked as a servant in Manchester saving enough money to open her own shop in Chorlton-Upon-Medlock in the shadows of the textile mills.

Shop owners, including Lily, paid rates to the local council. All men who were ratepayers were entitled to vote, and presumably due to being a ratepayer, Lily's name mistakenly appeared on the registered list of voters.

Although women weren't allowed to vote at the time, Lily took her registered name as an opportunity to defy this at Chorlton Town Hall in 1867 accompanied by Lydia Becker, an early supporter of the suffragist movement, and cast her vote for the local Member of Parliament. As Lily was clearly listed, the returning officer had little choice but to accept her vote. It is said that the room erupted with cheers for Britain's first ever female voter.

Lily Maxwell died in a Workhouse and was largely forgotten, whilst Lydia Becker went on to be celebrated for her work alongside other well-known middle class women who contributed to the cause such as the Pankhursts.

However, the contributions of ordinary, working class women like Lily are just as important and should be celebrated as a significant part of working class history and women's rights associated with the area in which Hotspur House is situated. The public realm proposal is an opportunity to bring to light forgotten stories of Lily Maxwell and other ordinary people who once walked along Cambridge Street and crossed the River Medlock or perhaps even those who worked in Medlock House itself.

18thC



The Cotton Mills

Early cotton mills built in the late 18th century, some supported by the River Medlock and other waterways.

19thC



The Hotspur Press

During the late 19th century, some of the early cotton mills changed hands leading to a new era of alternative uses, such as the Hotspur Press which was adapted for printing processes by the printing firm Percy Brother.

20thC



O2 Ritz

During the 19th century the area began to grow as a cultural hub of Manchester, defined by landmark venues such as the Ritz Dancehall (now O2 Ritz) and the Palace theatre.

21stC



HOME

Presently, the area is defined by mixed-use developments such as First St which includes HOME, a dynamic arts centre. Many of the original Mill buildings are now converted residential development with a significant student population.

Context

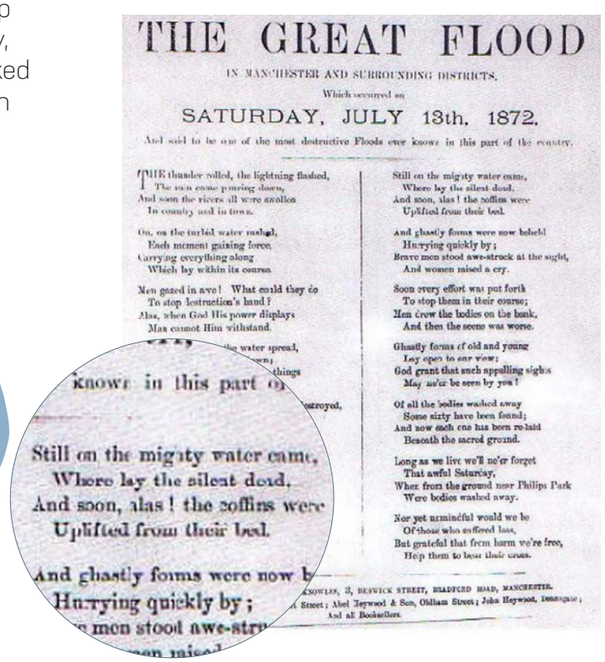
2.5. Site Context | The Hidden River

The River Medlock is one of three rivers around which Manchester is founded. Its name, originating from the Anglo-Saxon med lacu, means Meadow Stream, and conjures up images of a pre-industrial landscape. In reality, The River Medlock's history is intrinsically linked to the city's industrial past. This is revealed in stories of the river, which are documented in historic texts, articles, and photography.

"Along both sides of the stream, which is coal-black, stagnant and foul, stretches a broad belt of factories and working-men's dwellings, the latter all in the worst condition."

- Friedrich Engels, 1887

A "broadside ballad" written after the great flood of 1872 (Image: Confidentials)



THE GREAT FLOOD

IN MANCHESTER AND SURROUNDING DISTRICTS,

Which occurred on

SATURDAY, JULY 13th, 1872.

And said to be one of the most destructive Floods ever known in this part of the country.

THE thunder rolled, the lightning flashed,
The rain came pouring down,
And soon the rivers all were swollen
In country and in town.

On, on the turbid water rushed,
Each moment gaining force,
Carrying everything along
Which lay within its course.

Men gazed in awe! What could they do
To stop destruction's hand?
Alas, when God His power displays
Man cannot Him withstand.

Still on the mighty water came,
Where lay the silent dead,
And soon, alas! the coffins were
Uplifted from their bed.

And ghastly forms were now beheld
Hurrying quickly by;
Brave men stood awe-struck at the sight,
And women raised a cry.

Soon every effort was put forth
To stop them in their course;
Men drew the bodies on the bank,
And then the scene was worse.

Ghastly forms of old and young
Lay open to our view;
God grant that such appalling sights
May ne'er be seen by you!

Of all the bodies washed away
Some sixty have been found;
And now each one has been re-laid
Beneath the sacred ground.

Long as we live we'll ne'er forget
That awful Saturday,
When from the ground near Philips Park
Were bodies washed away.

Nor yet unmindful would we be
Of those who suffered loss,
But grateful that from harm we're free,
Help them to bear their cross.

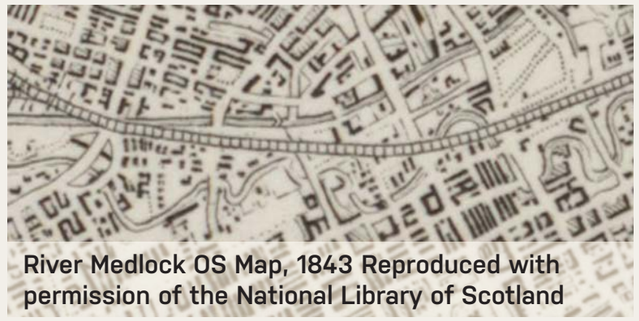
Known in this part o
Still on the mighty water came,
Where lay the silent dead,
And soon, alas! the coffins were
Uplifted from their bed.
And ghastly forms were now b
Hurrying quickly by;
men stood awe-str

1844 description of Little Ireland (an area formed by a loop of the Medlock near Oxford Road):

"In a rather deep hole, in a curve of the Medlock and surrounded on all four sides by tall factories and high embankments, covered with buildings, stand two groups of about two hundred cottages, built chiefly back to back, in which live about four thousand human beings, most of them Irish. The cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys."

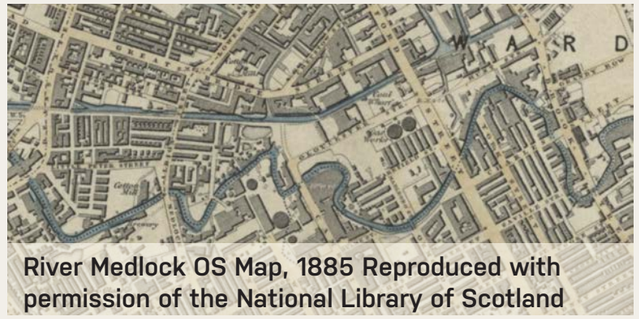
- Friedrich Engels, 1887

THE EVOLUTION OF THE RIVER MEDLOCK...



River Medlock OS Map, 1843 Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland

Originally depicted in a pasterol setting during the late 1700s, by the early 1800s, the urban centre of Manchester encroached the River Medlock



River Medlock OS Map, 1885 Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland

By the late 1800s much of the River was still visible from street level, covered only by bridges linking the street network from north to south.



River Medlock today (imagery © Google)

Today, the River Medlock is largely culverted below ground. Whist it is visible in some locations, it's journey through Manchester is mostly hidden.

In 2018 the River Medlock underwent a £250,000 re-naturalisation project at Clayton Vale. At Mayfield Park (which opened in 2022) culverts have been removed. Through these interventions, hidden parts of the river have been revealed and new habitats have been created.

Context

2.6. Site Context | Historical Buildings

The historical features of the surrounding buildings of interest contribute to the character and heritage of the application site setting.

There is a prevalence of red brick and industrial features on the former mill buildings whilst nearby entertainment buildings including The Ritz and The Palace Theatre form part of the history of arts and culture in the area.



1.



2.



3.

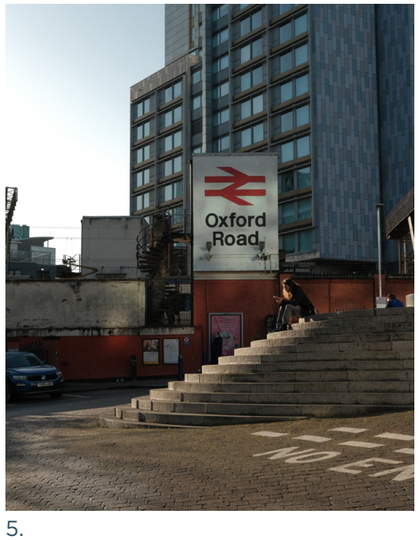


4.

1. Hotspur Press

Other Listed Buildings:

2. Macintosh Mills & Chimney
3. Chorlton New Mill & Chimney
4. Chatham Mill
5. Oxford Rd Train Station
6. The Ritz Dance Hall
7. The Palace Theatre
8. Former Refuge Assurance Company Offices



5.



6.



7.



8.

Context

2.7. Site Context | Existing Public Art

The area around Hotspur Press including nearby First Street, Cambridge Street, and HOME, is a vibrant hub for public art. Statues, street furniture, and sculpture feature alongside transitional murals and temporary public realm installations.

Notable installations include:

1. Friedrich Engels statue
2. Sculptural cycle racks
3. HOME as an outdoor venue for play, theatre, art film, music, and comedy
4. Public realm temporary installations
5. Bespoke signage
6. Art murals outside Oxford Road Station
7. 'Up There' series by Colin Spofforth

These pieces collectively contribute to an area that celebrates and integrates public art into its urban landscape.

There is great potential to connect the Hotspur Press development into a wider arts trail interwoven with the heritage of the surrounding area.



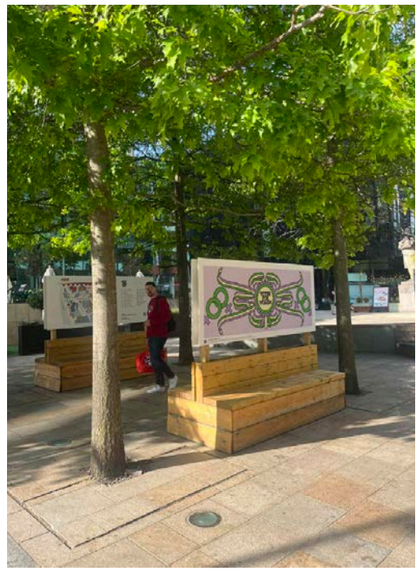
1.



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Context

2.8. Site Context | Materiality and Form

Prior to the fire, the Hotspur Press building and its setting were distinct in the numerous industrial features that could be identified throughout the site. Signage and metalwork including the iconic blue lettering were visual reminders of the historic link of the site to the industrial revolution.

Although the building is in a state of partial collapse, some aspects of the original materials remain.

Red tones are dominant and are visible in the brickwork, paint colour, and rusted metal of signs and structures.



Iron railway bridge crossing Gloucester Street



Hotspur Press Original Lettering (2017)



Bridge over River Medlock



Past entrance to modern day design business



Surviving red window frames to lower floors, looking on to the River Medlock



Remaining evidence of multiple business usage



Remaining wall mural on site, facing onto Gloucester Street

Context

2.9. Site Context | Mill History

Hotspur Press (or Hotspur House) is historically known as Medlock Mill, the oldest standing textile mill in Manchester. It was built in c. 1794, as a steam-assisted, water-powered textile mill that was originally used for spinning cotton, and spinning flax.

In 1801, Medlock Mills suffered from a fire. There are conflicting reports regarding the final death count and building damage. However, it was impactful enough to inspire commemorative poetry that featured 20 years later in the 1822 book entitled the 'Metrical Records of Manchester'.

...When upwards of forty poor souls, by fire, perish'd!-
Distresses, like these, by our feelings are cherish'd!-
Yes! sighs will arise - and the eyes with tears fill,
When Remembrance reverts to the burnt "Medlock Mill.

In 1864, the mill was bought by John Rylands and Sons, major manufacturers of cotton fabric. They initially used Medlock Mill for making finished garments, using industrial sewing machines.

The printing firm Percy Brothers Ltd took over the site around 1902, and named it the Hotspur Press (after Shakespeare's character Sir Henry Percy, nicknamed Harry Hotspur) – installing the extant external timber lettering by 1903.

THE CHANGING FACE OF HOTSPUR PRESS...

18thC



C. 1794 The mill started life as a steam assisted, water powered textile mill. Six stories high, different floors spun cotton and flax or used powered looms for weaving

20thC



1902 The building later became a printing press and for over 70 years printed a huge variety of popular comic books and journals.

21stC



2011 The warehouse later provided studio space for artists and musicians. The building and its rich heritage acted as a hub for the city's creative population.

"On Saturday morning, about a quarter before four o'clock, a police watchman perceived that a portion of Mr. Fairweather's factory, Cambridge-street, at the bottom of Gloucester-street, on the Manchester bank of the river Medlock, was on fire."

- Manchester Courier
(Saturday 17th June 1837)

"There were many ingots of lead alloy hanging from chains above melting pots sending fumes throughout the building, printing ink fumes now known to be carcinogenic as well as solvents and other products – forget any romantic notions about crafts of the past."

- Bob Cummins
(On his time working as an apprentice printer at Hotspur Press in the 1960s)

"You felt like you were in a building with a connection to the past."

- Chara Lewis, lecturer at Manchester School of Art
(On her studio at Hotspur Press)



3

Themes

Key Themes

Informed by analysis of the wider city context and the historic characteristics of the site itself, the following three converging themes (visually illustrated in the adjacent image), inform the proposed arts and heritage interventions explored on the following pages.

1. Arts and Culture

The past creative uses of the Hotspur Press should provide influence for the look and feel of the development including materials, colour palettes, signage and artwork.

2. Industrial History and Stories

Located on the border of a conservation area and enclosed by a number of heritage buildings, the landscape will provide a setting to help celebrate these and communicate the rich cultural history of the site.

It aims to include the memories of the built heritage and people that have worked and experienced the site since the industrial revolution.

3. The Hidden River Medlock

Historically, the mill utilised the river's water for power via a steam assisted water wheel. Now, the River Medlock runs partially below the street network in the wider setting of the site and emerges aside the south and west side of Hotspur Press.



Figure 3.1: Diagram illustrating three key themes which inform the proposed arts and heritage interventions



4

Proposals

Proposals

4.1. Interpretive Installations and Public Art

Proposed public art installations at Hotspur Press aim to celebrate, engage and educate the public on its industrial heritage and connection with the surrounding landscape.

Proposals include the following:

Art Murals

A programme of murals by local artists that reflect the heritage and identity of the area.

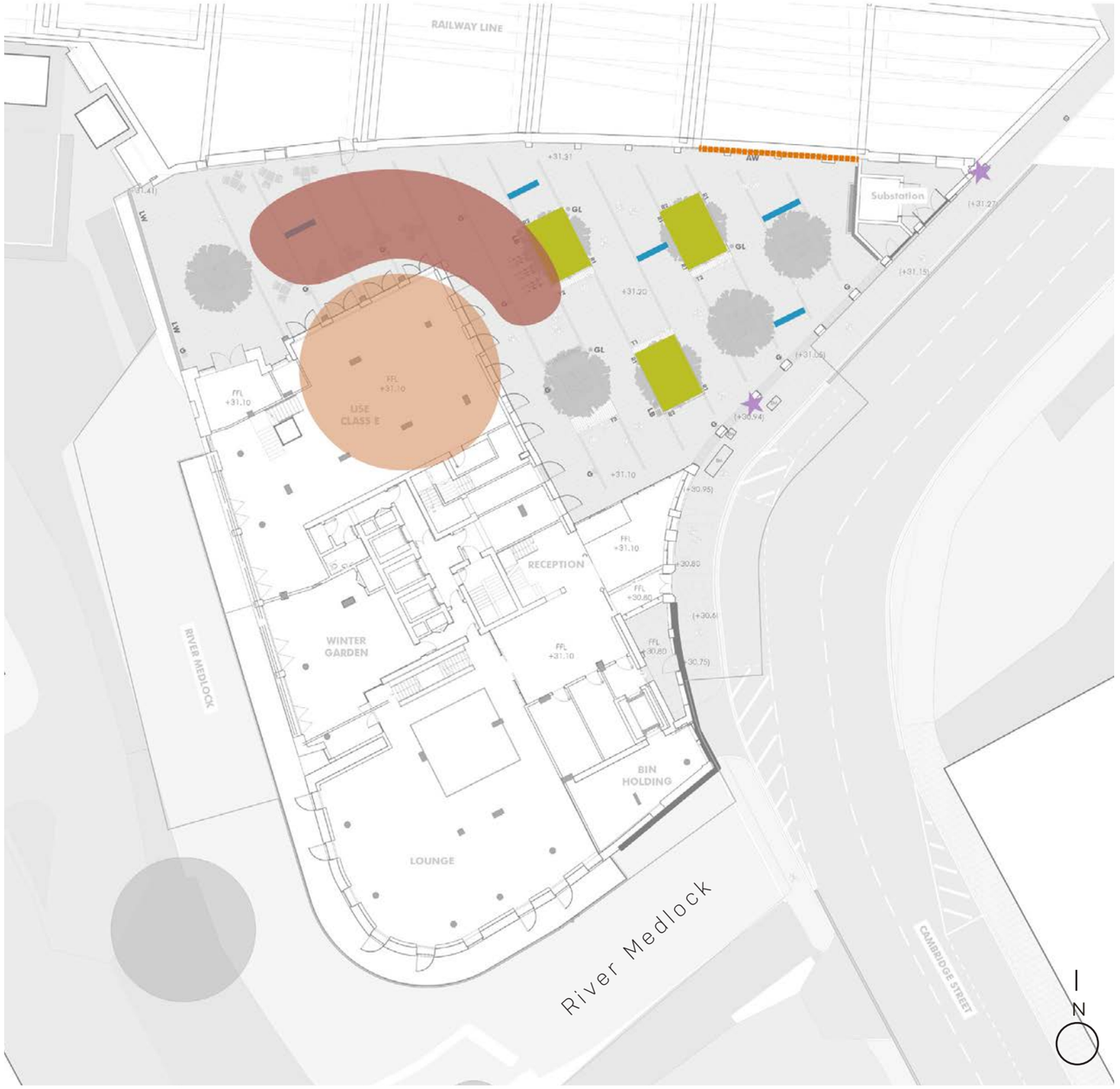
By integrating murals onto existing walls and structures, it creates a visually engaging environment that attracts visitors, fosters local pride, and tells the story of the local area.

Metalwork Inlays

The metalwork inlay mimics the traditional printing plate, and features typical typefaces used by the Hotspur Press. The inlays present the origins of the Percy Brother LTD 'Hotspur Press' name which has a direct connection to Shakespeare. This is well linked to the local arts and culture of the nearby theatres and can feed into future art trails to connect with the neighbouring buildings.

Etchings and Engravings

Historical information, images and interpretive patterns will be etched into paving stone and furniture to artistically connect visitors to the history and landscape of the site.



Public Art

External facade art mural by local artists or community organisations with links to the industrial history and the River Medlock

Natural stone and metalwork etchings within paving representing the history of the site Metalwork inlays with themes relating to origins of the Percy Brother LTD 'Hotspur Press' name linked to arts and culture

Street Furniture

Wayfinding signage with themes relating to the Hotspur Press signage and original adverts

Commercial ground floor unit with potential creative business occupiers linked to the curation of temporary external installations and exhibition in the adjacent public realm

Interpretation measures in the public realm linked to building occupiers e.g. temporary public artwork installations.

Figure 4.1: Plan overlayed onto landscape proposals, indicating potential public art opportunities

Proposals

4.2. Interpretive Installations and Public Art

Proposed public art can detail:

- Historical images and quotes from the varied industries and occupiers of the mill through time
- References to the Hidden River Medlock through imagery and patterns
- 'Hotspur Press' logo and name
    - Typography used by Hotspur Press
- Historic timeline of the site
- Architectural floorplans of the mill and its varied uses
- Working with local artists or communities to design murals with poetry and/or visuals to represent the heritage of the site and surrounding area. For example, a mural could reflect the image and story of Lily Maxwell and her story as the first female voter which is often forgotten.

Precedents, Manchester and Northern England

Nearby sites within Manchester and other cities in the north have presented past history of the site with text, imagery and sculpture. Similar applications should be used on site to engage visitors with the heritage of the Hostpur Press.



Lemn Sissay's street poem 'Flags' embedded within metalwork inlays, Northern Quarter.



Columns in Cutting Room Square contain images of the old industrial buildings which once occupied the square.



A series of metal paving inlays form a tactile trail throughout Pound Park, Sheffield.



Artwork mural, Northern Quarter

Proposals

4.3. Interpretive Installations and Public Art

The floorscape provides an opportunity to implement subtle design features informed by the site heritage, creating visual connections to the past as an interpretive element of the landscape.

The landscape proposals for the scheme indicate the potential locations for art features integrated within the paving. These could include engraved natural stone and / or metal inlays which could have a typeface inspired by printing press typesets of the Hotspur Press.

Indicative Proposals | Metalwork Inlays and Etchings and Engravings

Indicative examples of both engraved natural stone and metal inlay displaying a historic timeline of the site. This could relate to the phases of use since the industrial revolution and include extracts of quotes and stories of those that once worked there.



Figure 4.2: Vignette illustrating potential floorscape inlay

Proposals

4.4. Interpretive Installations and Public Art

Public art in street furniture and wayfinding will reflect the cultural identity and history of the site through integration of artistic designs within the material structure.

Featured street furniture will include:

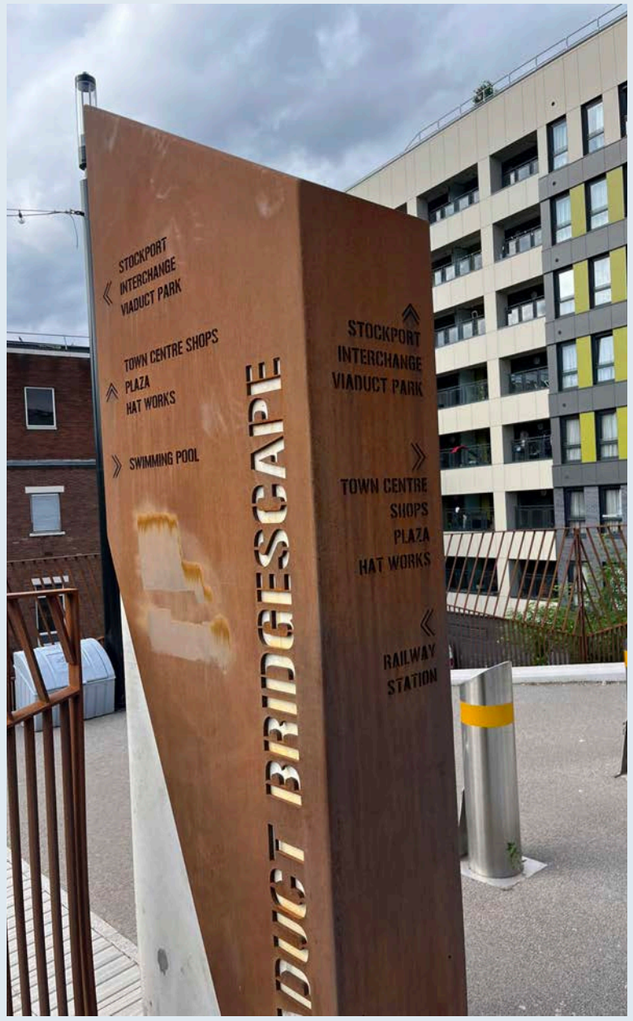
- Seating
- Litter bins
- Wayfinding and signage
- Tree grilles
- Interpretation boards

Proposed public art features in street furniture will include:

- Laser cut graphics into corten steel featuring:
  - Patterns of local wildlife, habitats and forms found in the river environment
  - Patterns of the River Medlock
  - Abstract patterns to represent features of the industrial past such as of the weaving or printing processes
  - Typography used at the Printing Press
  - Historical imagery
- Wayfinding and signage in the style and layout of the original Percy Brothers advertisements
- Interpretation boards with art, imagery, and informative text

Precedents

Examples of street furniture which reflect past history of the sites with text, imagery and sculpture. Similar applications should be used on site to engage visitors with the heritage of the Hostpur Press.



Signage at Stockport Viaduct Bridgescape. Material and font choices reflect the industrial character of the area.



Historical images integrated into street furniture (Carlisle)



Typical typeface during the period of the Hotspur Press which could be implemented as part of the branding and wayfinding strategy.

Proposals

4.5. Interpretive Installations and Public Art

The application site is located on Gloucester Street, which connects Cambridge Street with Whitworth Street West.

The existing railway viaduct runs along the northern boundary and the River Medlock along the south and west.

The majority of the existing application site is occupied by buildings including the historical 18th-century mill, originally used as a textile mill and later by the printing company Percy Brothers.

These site buildings suffered significant damage in the recent fire.

Indicative Proposals | Street Furniture

Example of wayfinding column representing the hidden river and historic streetscape along which the Hotspur Press building originated. Text reflects original Hotspur Press advertisements whilst the location marker is highlighted in the iconic blue associated with the existing building signage.

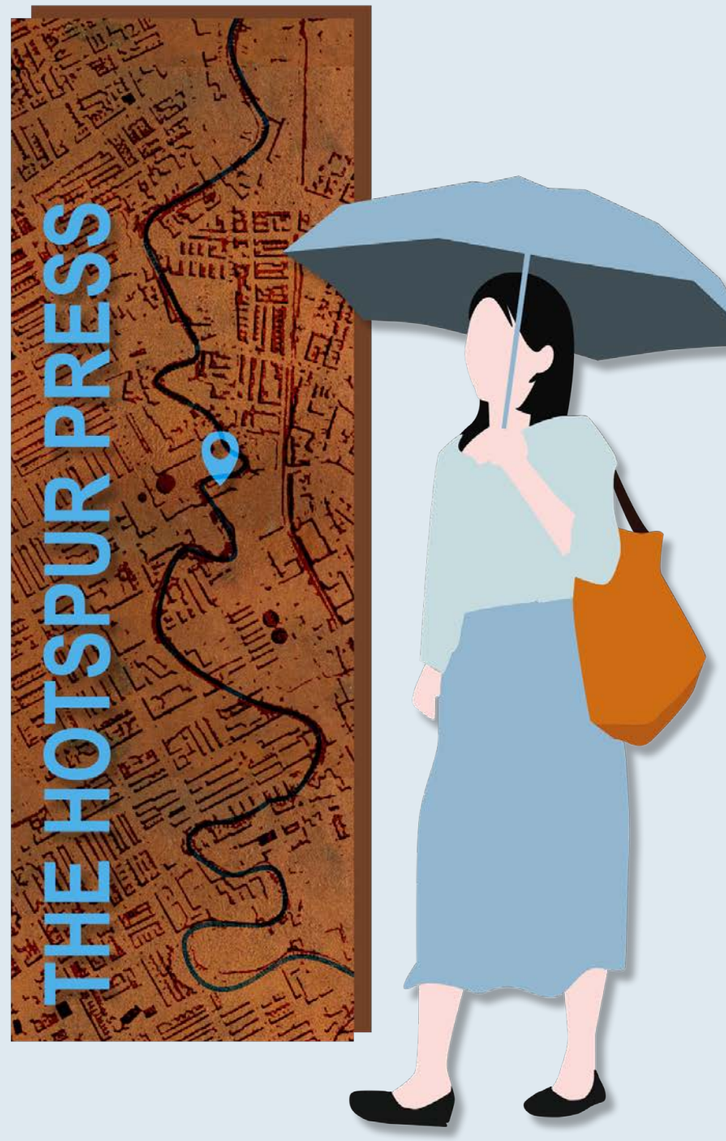


Figure 4.3: Vignette illustrating potential wayfinding interventions inspired by the site heritage

Proposals

4.6. Site Activation

The history and stories from the site and its surrounds will be brought to life through interactive and variable activation of the public realm.

Proposals include the following:

Projections

Various colour, text and imagery will be projected onto the ground, building façades and walls. This activates areas of special interest and creates opportunities for seasonal and exhibition lighting to attract visitors and connect them to the site.

Performance

The landscape design layout provides space for pop-up exhibitions and performance that could be linked with the surrounding theatre and arts community such as HOME.

Technology

Historical information, images and modern exhibitions could be available digitally through QR codes to websites, apps and augmented reality at specific locations.

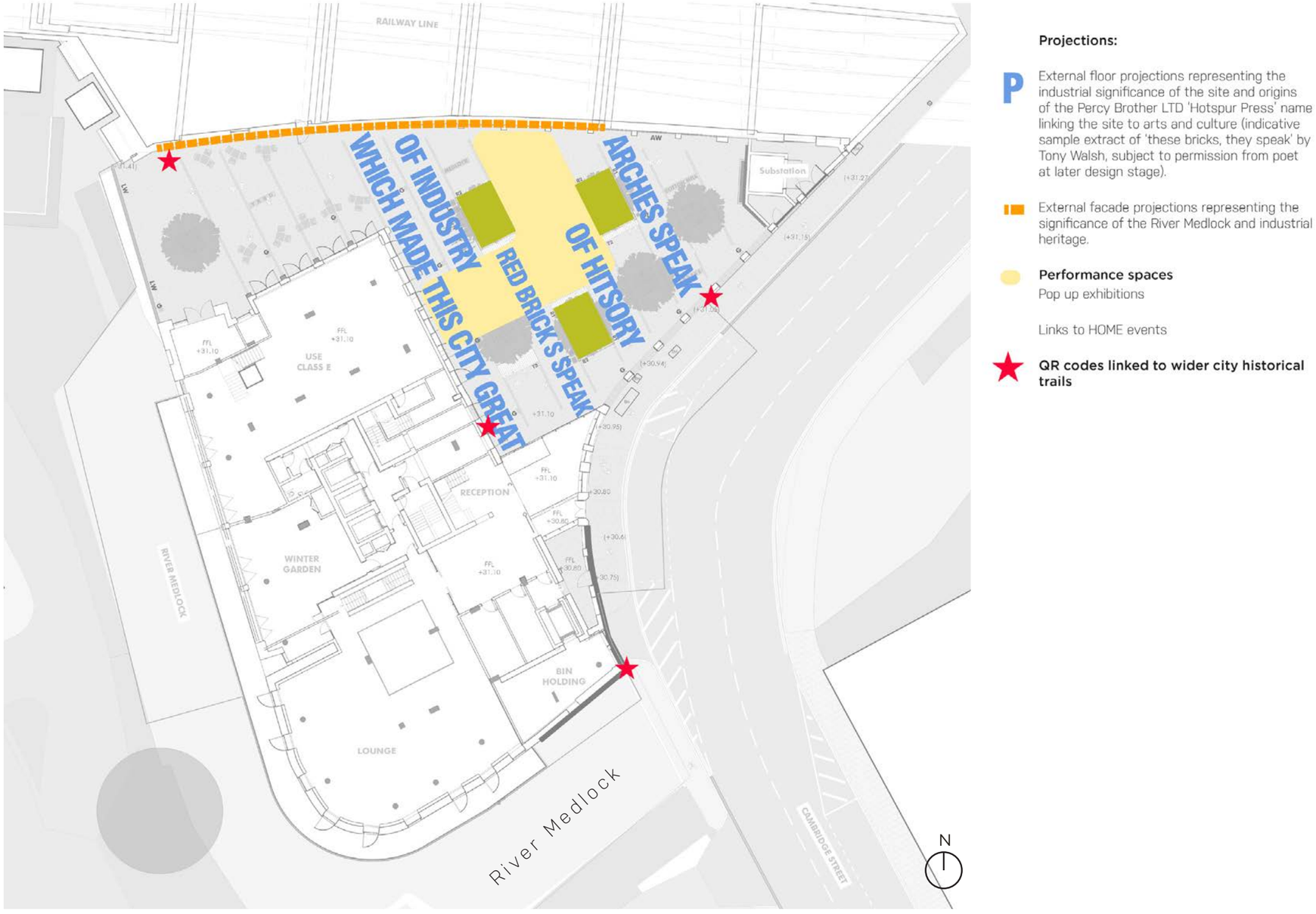


Figure 4.4: Plan overlayed onto landscape proposals, indicating potential site activation opportunities

Proposals

4.7. Site Activation

The following proposals activate the landscape and create a place in which visitors can interact with the site both physically and digitally.

This includes:

- Light projections displaying:
  - Gobo lighting to project onto the floor and highlight areas of special interest on the site e.g. façades, viaduct, River Medlock
  - Floorplans of the historic mill
  - Seasonal themes e.g. Christmas
  - Extracted lines from Shakespeare's play 'Henry IV' featuring Sir Henry Percy (Harry Hotspur) whom inspired the name of 'Hotspur Press, Percy Brothers Ltd.'.
    - Poetic text, imagery, graphics and information
  - Typeface relating to Percy Brothers Ltd.
  - River Medlock path pattern
  - Play patterns
- Mobile activated augmented reality providing:
  - Heritage information
  - Site location information
  - Modern exhibitions and 3D art
  - Interactive characters e.g. historical people
  - Historic information about Manchester and the mill's production processes
  - Virtual play
- QR codes leading to online website linked to wider city initiatives
- Visitor trails of the site and its surroundings outdoor performance space
- Temporary outdoor exhibitions
- Collaboration with local artists and community groups to utilise the public realm for pop up events

Precedents



Lighting projections curated in the future with surrounding cultural organisation. Links to key themes including the hidden heritage and the River Medlock.



Projections onto historical features including the building facade and the neighbouring viaduct, following proposed themes of local heritage, the hidden river, and stories.



QR code used as a tool to link users to virtual exhibits.



Spaces for outdoor performance, pop up exhibitions, with links to HOME.

Proposals

4.8. Site Activation

Indicative Proposals

Indicative illustrations of augmented reality to allow visitors the opportunity to interact with the historic landscape

Digital links that bring up historic images and information regarding the River Medlock, the mill, its employees and past production processes.

Augmented reality that brings characters to life through the lens. Click onto individual people to learn more about their role within the mill and 18th-21st century life in Manchester.



Figure 4.5: Vignette illustrating an example of augmented reality, bringing historical character into the modern public realm

Proposals

4.9. Existing Historic features

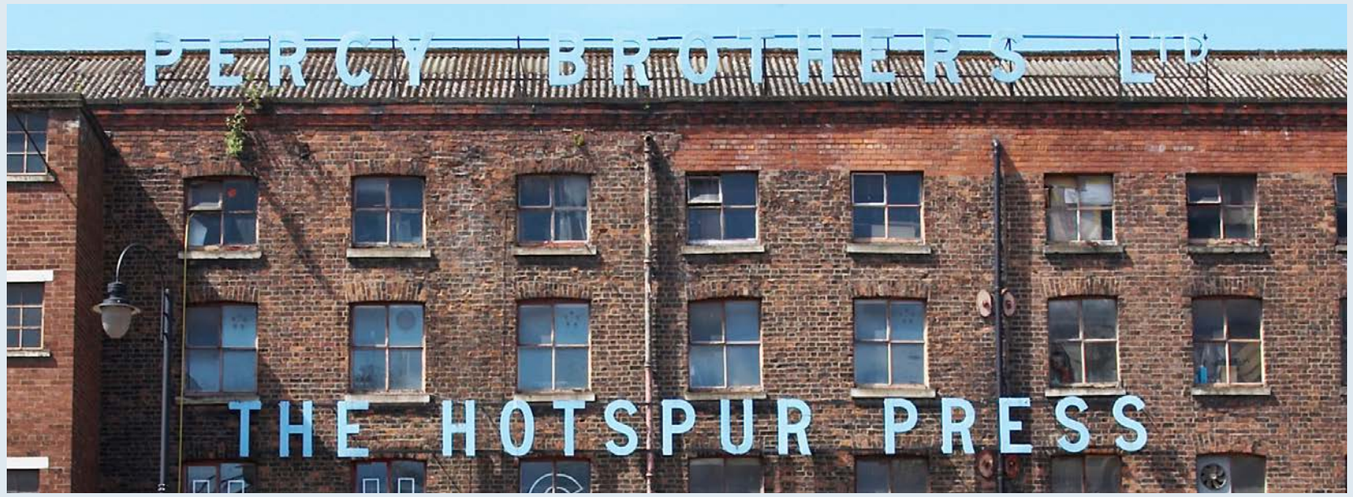
Existing historic features of the mill to be retained provide inspiration for design features within the public art on site.

The iconic blue typeface of the original Percy Brothers' Hotspur Press' signage, for instance, will be replicated to feature across the different interpretative installations.

The colour and typeface creates a strong site identity that can be replicated on information boards, and within inlays, and engravings proposed in the previous chapters.

An image of original stone signage 'Medlock Mills 1801' could be highlighted on interpretation boards and a QR code will lead to further historical information and images relating to the original stone.

Heritage



Iconic blue 'Percy Brothers Hotspur Press Signage'

Application

HOTSPUR

PRESS

FONT TYPEFACE TO BE IDENTIFIED

Colour and typeface to be used across the site to create a strong consistent identity and connection with the site's evolving history.



The original date stone located below the Hotspur Press signage (before the fire of 2025), stating 'Medlock Mills 1801'. This text could be reproduced for historical interpretation features.



Corten interpretation board with historic imagery and facts relating to the Medlock Mills

Proposals

4.9. Existing Historic features

Following the fire in 2025, there could be potential to set aside historic bricks and iron features which survived the event, with the aim to seek to reuse the materials within the public realm. Although the materials which may be available are currently unknown, this sheet sets out potential interventions if materials became available.

These interventions would provide an opportunity to retain some elements of the original Hotspur Press building on site, creating a visual connection to the past and ensuring the heritage of the place is not forgotten.

Precedents



Reclaimed bricks to fill gabion baskets forming benches or planters as a sustainable approach to street furniture



Gabions filled with reclaimed brick as retaining feature



Placement of reclaimed iron features within planting



Retained or reclaimed iron structures could present opportunities to support climbing plants

Illustrative Visual





5

Summary

Summary

5.1. Beyond the Boundary

This report illustrates how redeveloping the Hotspur Press site and the creating new public realm can be a catalyst for unearthing the sites lost history and retelling the forgotten stories.

This influence of these interventions has the potential to go beyond the application boundary, as part of a wider cultural trail linking together the many notable sites, buildings and stories, as well as the river corridor itself which have played their part in the unique story of Manchester.

The illustrative plan opposite highlights the pivotal location of Hotspur Press between heritage assets, cultural institutions, new developments and the hidden River Medlock.

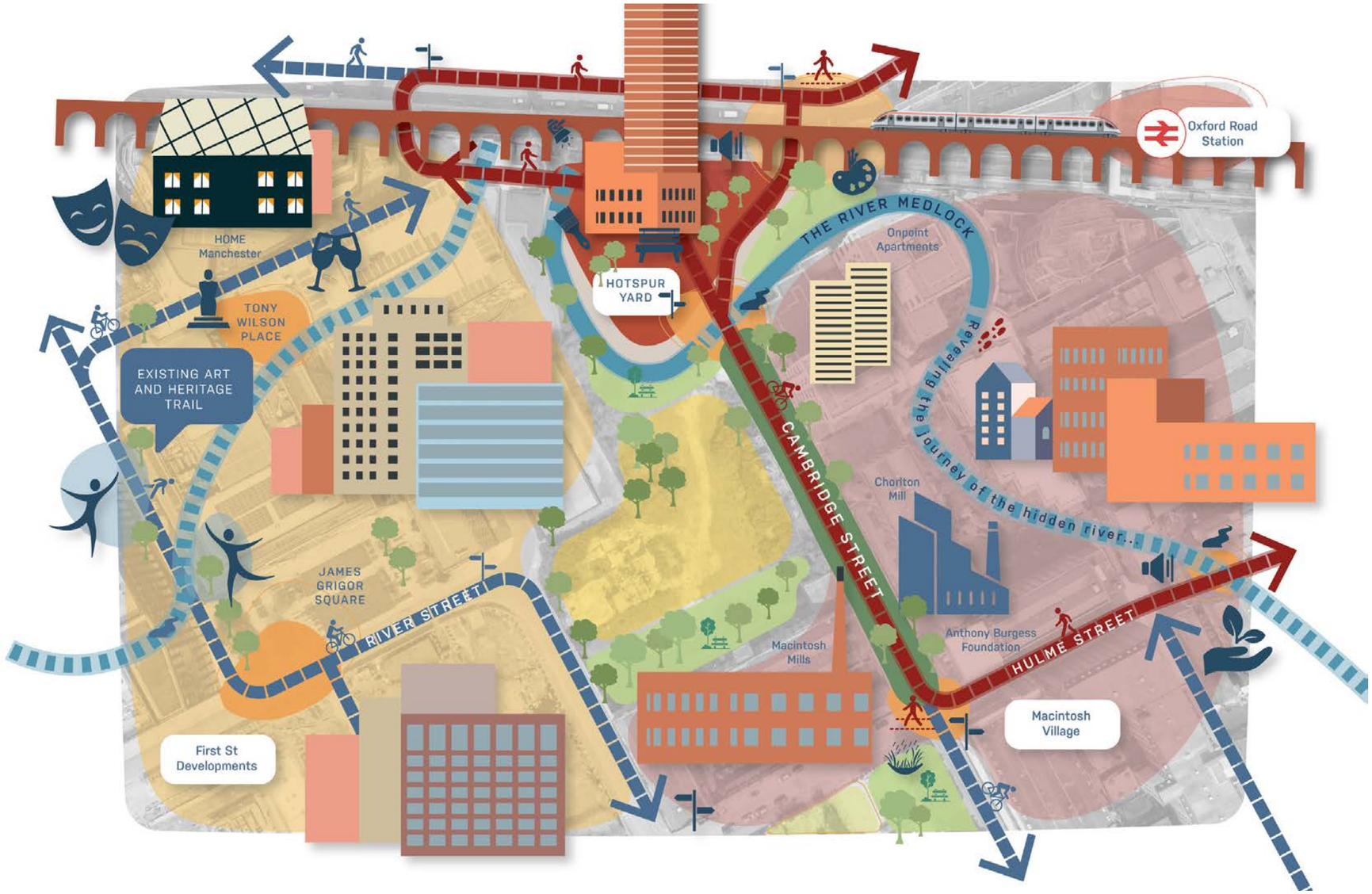


Figure 5.1: Plan illustrating potential influence of interventions beyond the boundary

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Lucid
design studio