MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Planning

Delegated Officer Report

Summary of application details

Application reference:	PLA-2026-000893
Application type:	Listed building consent (Alt/Ext)
Proposal:	Listed Building Consent for the installation of 2no. digital advertising displays.
Site address:	Victoria Metro Station Platforms A B and C D Manchester M4 3AJ
Ward(s):	Piccadilly
Date application valid:	02 July 2026
Applicant name:	Mr Jonathan Smith
Agent (if any):	Mr Ben Kelly
Case officer:	Michael Pearson
Recommendation:	Refuse
Date of recommendation:	05/08/2026

Description of site, building and/or area

The application relates to the metrolink tram stop within the Grade II listed Victoria Railway Station. The property consists of a variety of buildings of varying ages, the oldest of which is the former booking office, that fronts out onto the corner of Hunts Bank and Victoria Station Approach and dates from 1848 with 1865 upper floor extension. The main body of the station, this being the Victoria Buildings, dates from the station's major remodelling in 1909. The station has gone through significant renovation since then however, with the addition of the 1995 Manchester Arena, and in the 2010's with the removal of the Edwardian train sheds to the rear of the site and its replacement with a modern glazed roof structure. The metrolink tram stops date from the station's remodelling in the 2010's and sit adjacent to the 1909 Victoria buildings.

The application site and neighbouring area lie at the northern edge of Manchester City Centre, where the high density development of said centre borders Salford across the River Irwell, and gradually gives way to smaller scale development to the north and north-west to the neighbourhoods of Red Bank and Cheetham Hill. Built development is varied in character, age, scale and design. More modern buildings form the immediate surroundings around the application site, this includes the Manchester Arena, Stoller Hall and the New-Vic apartment complex. More historic development is then situated to the south of the site in the form of the Grade I listed Cheetham's School of Music. Neighbouring uses are largely commercial, with the exception of residential accommodation present on the grounds of Cheetham's and the New-Vic apartment complex.

Description of development

The application seeks listed building consent for the installation of 2no digital advertisement display totems.

The totems would be placed at the south-western end of Metrolink platforms AB and CD, facing towards the platforms' entrance. Said totems would be completed in black powder coated pressed steel, with a height of 2495mm, a width of 1345mm and a dept of 400mm. The totems would then feature double sided displays, with each screen having a height of 1925mm and a width of 1.105mm.

The totems would be used for the display of advertisements, with 16% of their screentime dedicated to Transport for Greater Manchester announcements.

Relevant planning history

136972/LO/2023 - Listed building consent for the installation of 3no. advertising screens in various locations within railway concourse – Refused June 2023. Appeal dismissed January 2024.

Consultation, notification and publicity responses

Publicity – A site notice and press notice were published. No representations were received.

Relevant policies

The Places for Everyone Plan – Joint Development Plan Document, for nine of the 10 boroughs which make up Greater Manchester adopted on 21st of March 2024:

- Policy JP-P2 – Heritage

The Manchester Core Strategy – Development Plan Document 2012 – 2027 ("the Core Strategy") was adopted by the City Council on the 11th of July 2012:
- Policy SP1 – Spatial Principles
- Policy CC9 – Design and Heritage
- Policy EN1 – Design Principles and Strategic Character Areas
- Policy EN3 – Heritage
- Policy DM1 – Development Management

The Unitary Development Plan for Manchester – For the reasons outlined below the following saved UDP Policies are of relevance to this application:
- Policy DC15 – Advertisements, Hoarding and Posters
- Policy DC19 – Listed Buildings

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed and Beautiful Places
- Chapter 16 – Conserving the Historic Environment

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (2025)
The government has published a consultation National Planning Policy Framework which is intended to improve housebuilding rates through a clearer, more predictable and faster policy basis for decision and plan making. Whilst this is a draft NPPF for consultation it is considered that the development proposals are in accordance with the general thrust of policy contained within it.

Other Legislative Requirements
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (LBCA Act) states that in considering whether to grant Listed Building Consent for any works the Local Planning Authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 66 of the LBCA Act requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings. This requires more than a simple balancing exercise and considerable importance and weight should be given to the desirability of preserving the setting.

Assessment

Victoria Railway Station is a listed building of high significance, representing the growth of the railway industry and its key role within the industrialisation and expansion of Manchester. The station has had multiple modern editions, that whilst architecturally distinct from the original building, form part of its listing. Consequently, it is acknowledged that these spaces do not contribute to the significance of the listed building as much as original fabric. However, notwithstanding this, this does not allow for new editions to modern parts of the listed building to be unsympathetically designed nor sited.

Victoria Metrolink stop, as previously mentioned within this report, is a modern edition to the listed building, dating from the station's remodelling in the 2010s that saw the installation of the current canopy structure. The stop is separated from the Victoria Buildings by an active tramline, though both said building and the metrolink stop can be clearly appreciated simultaneously and are read as forming part of the wider station. The modern element of Victoria Station is considered to accompany that of the historic portion well, with its simplistic minimalist design and material pallet, contrasting, yet complimenting that of the 1909 and Victorian build.

As existing, the station features a minimal number of advertisements, though digital display boards for transport information do feature. It is considered there is a fundamental difference between the impact that digital display screens for the purpose of conveying travel information have, compared to that of advertisements, principally the former being critical to the operation of the site as a railway station, and that of the latter serving no operational purpose and contributing to visual clutter within the locality.

It is considered the proposed totems would be visually imposing and incongruous modern features within the station that would add visual clutter to the station concourse, negatively impacting upon the significance of the listed building. It is acknowledged that the development would not physically obscure historic material, however, it would undermine the design intentions of the approved modern redevelopment works, which in turn would lead to the erosion of the relationship between it and the historic fabric of the building, thereby causing a low level of less than substantial harm to be caused to the significance of the listed building. Further to this, the proposals would not only contribute to visual clutter within the station but also represent an intensification of advertisements within it, due to the increase in their number but also how due to their digital nature that provides rolling advertisements that have a more noticeable presence than that of non-illuminated static advertisements. It is noted this would follow the same case as presented by the Local Planning Authority under application 136972/LO/2023 in which 3no digital advertisements were proposed and subsequently dismissed at appeal (Appeal number APP/B4215/Y/23/3329750).

The submission has been accompanied by supporting information that denotes that public benefit would be generated through the implementation of the proposals by the revenue that would be brought about via the advertisements that would be shown that would then be put back into the operation of the station, and the 16% screentime that would be given to Transport for Greater Manchester for conveying their own non-essential customer information. No evidence has been given as to how much money would be raised through advertisement revenue, and how it would be put back into the operation of the station. In line with this, and how the proposed boards are not critical in the operation of the application site as a railway station and metrolink stop, it is considered there is insufficient recognisable public benefit that would be generated by the proposals that would outweigh the identified harm.

Conclusion

In line with the above, it has been found that the proposal would cause a low level of less than substantial harm to be caused to the significance of the listed building, by virtue of the development constituting a visually imposing and incongruous addition to the listed building that would distract and detract from its historical significance and would not contribute to the continued operation of the site as a live railway station and metrolink stop. No identifiable public benefit has been found that would outweigh the recognised harm, and thus the proposal would not meet the statutory test to preserve or enhance the significance of the heritage asset. Therefore, the proposal would fail to meet the requirements as set out under Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 in relation to preservation, and would fail to accord with Places for Everyone Plan Policy JP-P2, Core Strategy Policies SP1, CC9, EN1, EN3 and DM1, Saved Unitary Development Plan Policies DC15 and DC19, the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. On this basis the application is recommended for refusal.

Other Legislative Requirements

Equality Act 2010

Section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty) of the Equality Act 2010 requires due regard to the need to: Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act and; Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The Equality Duty does not impose a legal requirement to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment. Compliance with the Equality Duty involves consciously thinking about the aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making.

Human Rights Act 1998 considerations

This application needs to be considered against the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. Under Article 6, the applicants (and those third parties, including local residents, who have made representations) have a right to a fair hearing and to this end the local planning authority must give full consideration to their comments.

Protocol 1 Article 1, and Article 8 where appropriate, confer(s) a right of respect for a person's home, other land and business assets. In taking account of all material considerations, including Council policy as set out in the Core Strategy and saved polices of the Unitary Development Plan, the Director of Planning, Building Control & Licensing has concluded that some rights conferred by these articles on the applicant(s)/objector(s)/resident(s) and other occupiers and owners of nearby land that might be affected may be interfered with but that that interference is in accordance with the law and justified by being in the public interest and on the basis of the planning merits of the development proposal. She believes that any restriction on these rights posed by the recommendation given is proportionate to the wider benefits of and that such a decision falls within the margin of discretion afforded to the Council under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

Recommendation: Refuse

Reasons for refusal

1) The proposed digital advertisement boards, due to their siting, scale and appearance, together with being superfluous to the site's function as an active railway station and metrolink stop, would fail to respond positively to the character and appearance of the listed building, forming visually imposing and incongruous additions to it. The advertisement boards would be located in prominent positions within the station that would detract from its historic setting, contributing to the proliferation and intensification of advertisements within the station grounds. The proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the setting of the listed building, with the proposal also failing to provide the necessary public benefit to outweigh the identified harm. The proposal is therefore contrary to policies SP1, CC9, EN1, EN3 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012), saved policies DC15.1 and DC19.1 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (1995), the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.