Public artwork strategy proposed Warwick Street Ventilation Louvres

The proposed new louvres on the Warwick Street elevation are required as part of the smoke ventilation strategy serving the basement. The ventilation strategy has been developed in accordance with the requirements of Approved Document B (Fire Safety), which requires smoke from the basement to be discharged directly to the external environment.

A mechanical smoke ventilation system has been adopted for the basement. Under this approach, the required air intake and extract is 3.5m²free area/each , with an equivalent louvre area of 7m² being required for each air intake and extract on the Warwick Street elevation.

The location of the proposed louvres is dictated by both technical and design constraints. In particular, a safe separation distance must be maintained from the fire escape door on the Spear Street elevation, while the louvres themselves must be tested products that comply with the relevant Building Regulations and fire performance requirements. The technical design team has confirmed the following: 'the fire extract and intake must be located a min of 5m apart and also 5m away from any intake or extract to any other floors to avoid cross contamination'.

Replacing the existing full-height glazed panels with ventilation louvres represents a visual intervention to the building's elevation, with the potential to affect the appearance of both the host building and the surrounding conservation area. Consequently, both the City Council and the design team agreed that this visual impact should be sensitively mitigated. Various mitigation options were evaluated during the design development:

- Decorative bespoke screens: Discarded due to non-compliance with Building Regulations, as custom screens would require full fire testing to achieve necessary fire certification.

- Overlaid fire louvres with decorative screens: Discarded as placing screens over the louvres would obstruct the required free ventilation area, thereby forcing an increase in overall louvred area to achieve necessary intake/extract airflow.

it was discussed that the ground-floor elevations along Warwick Street and Spear Street already feature an established louvre profile; introducing a contrasting design language would create visual incongruity. It was then concluded that the most effective approach was the integration of new louvres designed to match the existing in the building, enhanced by site-specific artwork that incorporates the louvres as an intentional architectural feature rather than a retrofitted addition.

The proposed artwork takes inspiration from one of Manchester's most recognisable symbols: the worker bee. The host building already counts with a material palette of warm yellow brick and anodised gold window frames, naturally evoking the colours of honey, industry and craftsmanship. The artwork therefore seeks to build upon these existing architectural qualities, allowing the intervention to feel part of the building rather than applied onto it.

Rather than reproducing the worker bee as a standalone emblem, the design offers a contemporary interpretation that responds directly to the architecture. The artwork is integrated across the new ventilation louvres.

Each louvre is subtly interpreted as a honeycomb-inspired hexagonal pattern. This geometry can also be viewed as a molecular structure, symbolising the link between Manchester's industrial heritage, creative culture, and scientific innovation.

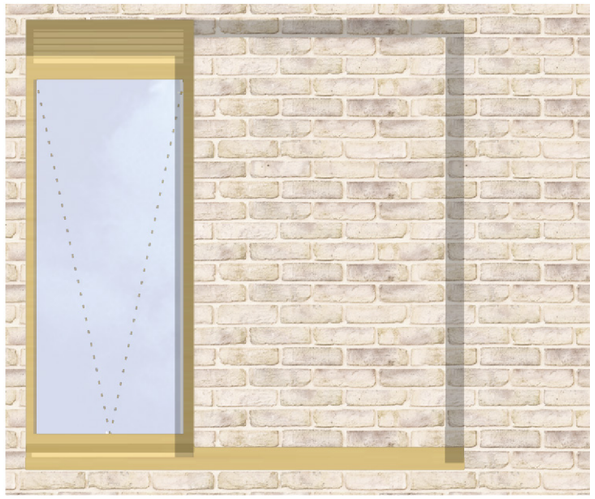
The louvres will be finished in a colour matching the existing anodised gold façade elements to maintain visual continuity. The honeycomb pattern will be spray-painted onto the louvres using slightly darker tones, such as deep ochre and burnt umber, producing a subtle tonal contrast. This restrained approach allows the ventilation elements to integrate seamlessly with the existing architecture while introducing an additional artistic layer that softens their visual impact.

The proposal reflects the character of the Northern Quarter, where public art frequently engages with the fabric of existing buildings. By integrating the artwork directly with the functional ventilation elements, the intervention transforms a necessary technical requirement into a meaningful contribution to the streetscape, reinforcing the identity of the building while respecting the architectural and historic character of the conservation area.

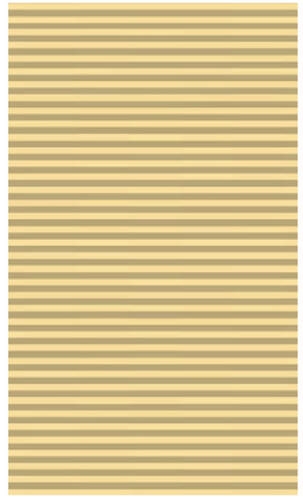
The artwork does not disguise the function of the louvres or compromise their performance, but instead celebrates a necessary building element through high-quality public art. This aligns well with conservation principles, where new interventions are often encouraged to be honest, legible and well-integrated rather than concealed.



honeycomb-inspired hexagonal pattern,also be viewed as a molecular structure



existing building yellow brick and anodised golden colour window frames



existing building anodised golden colour louvres

revision:	date:	note:
P01	2026.06.29	planning issue
P02	2026.08.17	revised following planning officer's comments on 2026.08.12

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Oldham Street, Manchester

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113

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