LEVRANT

NEW CENTURY HALL, Manchester

Proposed Soft Strip

Heritage Note

July 2026

Introduction

This Heritage Note has been prepared to support proposed soft strip works to the interior of the ground floor of the Grade II listed New Century Hall, Manchester. The report is produced by Levrant, a practice of conservation architects, surveyors, and heritage consultants who specialise in the built historic environment.

Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission applications have been submitted in relation to proposals to adapt and reconfigure the existing ground floor food hall arrangement previously approved (124348FO2019). The current operator has identified that the existing large open-plan food hall model has not proven commercially viable in its current form. While the venue has successfully hosted events and performances, the day-to-day food hall operation has struggled due to the scale and character of the space and the building's location which is slightly removed from the primary retail and leisure core of the city centre.

The proposals involve subdividing the ground floor into two complementary interconnected spaces consisting of the existing bar and food venue to the west side and a live music venue with ancillary facilities to the east.

Ahead of receiving formal consent, it is proposed to undertake a soft strip of modern fabric to the pot wash area, section of the bar, removal of the partition and door to the cleaner's store, strip out of the food concession units, removal of wall finishes in the green room, removal of the stage including acoustic fittings, including some lighting and power fittings, and the strip out of elements of the HVAC system.

The above elements are all part of the existing fit-out to the ground floor and are mostly free standing and will be removed and disposed of without any impact on the listed building fabric or indeed the special interest of the building.

This note confirms the fabric to be removed as part of the proposed soft strip is of no heritage interest.

This note should be read in conjunction with the Soft Strip Specification, by Edwards, and Methodology, by Tilbury Hall.

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This note was prepared by:

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Location and Designations

New Century Hall (outlined in red below, **Figure 1**) is located to the north of Manchester City Centre and occupies part of the block bounded by Miller Street, Dantzic Street and Sadlers Yard. New Century Hall is Grade II listed (the listing also includes New Century House but this element of the site is not subject of this report/ proposals). The building forms part of the area covered by the NOMA Strategic Regeneration Framework. This comprises the former Cooperative Group buildings located on the northern edge of Manchester City Centre including a number of Grade II listed buildings and part of the Shudehill Conservation Area.

Due to the nature of the proposed soft strip, which consist of localised internal works within the ground floor of New Century Hall only, all other heritage assets are scoped out of this report.



Figure 1: Plan illustrating the location of New Century Hall (outlined in red). The Shudehill Conservation Area is highlighted in blue. Listed Buildings are identified by the blue pins (Source: Historic England modified by Levrant).

Overview of Relevant Legislation, Planning Policy, and Guidance

This document was prepared in consideration of the following:

National Legislation and Policy

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024) N.B. Last updated February 2025.

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- The relevant paragraphs are: 135, 139, 207, 212, 213, 214, and 215

National Guidance

- National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) (2024)
- Conservation principles, policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment, English Heritage, April 2008
- Good Practice Advice in Planning, Historic England (GPAs):
  - Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (December 2017)
- Advice Notes, Historic England (HEANs)
  - Note 12 - Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets (October 2019)

Relevant Regional and Local Policy and Guidance

- Greater Manchester Combined Authority Places for Everyone (PfE) (2024)
  - Policy JP-P2 addresses 'Heritage'
- Manchester City Council's Core Strategy (2012)
  - Policy CC9 (Design and Heritage), Policy EN3 (Heritage)
- Manchester City Council's Unitary Development Plan
  - Development Control Policy 19.1 (listed buildings)

Significance Appraisal

The purpose of the significance appraisal is to use recognised criteria to assess the heritage significance and interest of the site and of the settings of the identified heritage assets which could be affected by the form of the proposed development of the site.

New Century Hall - Ground Floor

The list description notes that the ground floor of New Century Hall was "*originally used as the buyers' dining room and could accommodate 700 people. The presence of folding partitions mean that the room can be subdivided and a central corridor with rooms off to each side created. Two original dog-leg stairs are located at each corner of the south-east end.*" The full list description for the building, including New Century House is included in Appendix A.

New Century Hall reopened in 2022 following a programme of refurbishment. The first floor music venue space was reestablished, and the ground floor was converted into an open-plan kitchen and bar space with a small stage area to the east end. The southern elevation of the ground floor was glazed to provide light, visibility and access on to Sadlers Yard.

The main ground floor space is divided into three bays by two rows of columns which have splayed capitals directly supporting the concrete slab above. Inset within the principal slabs spanning between the columns are areas of reinforced concrete waffle slab. The floor is of reinforced concrete. Typically for the period of the build, the indentations formed by the timber shuttering which supported the concrete as it dried can still be seen giving an undulating appearance to the concrete.

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As part of the refurbishment works, partitioning was installed to the north side of the space to create back-of-house areas and WC facilities. Six kitchen units/pods are located to the periphery of the main space with a bar to the west of the centre. M&E equipment is hung from the ceiling using uni-struts and cable trays.

Figures 2-3 illustrate the current arrangement. **Table 1** provides details of the fabric proposed to be removed as part of the soft strip.

Statement of Significance

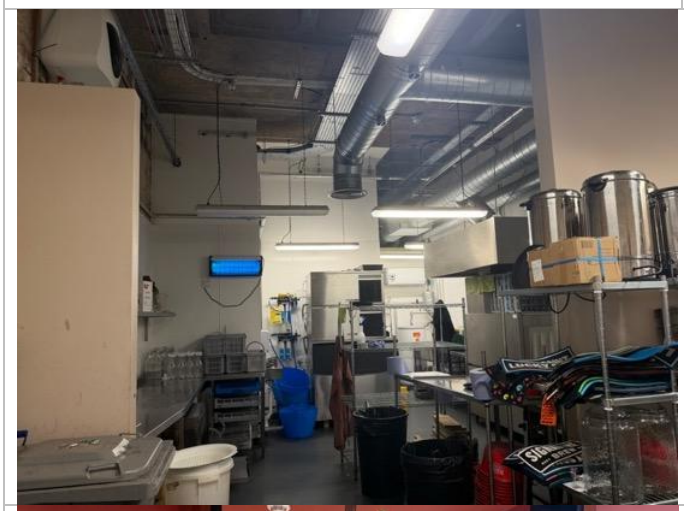
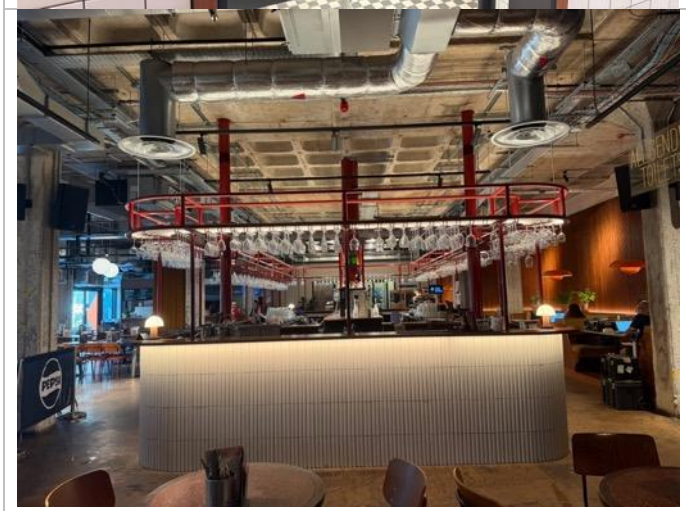
- The heritage significance of New Century Hall has been identified at a national level and is listed at Grade II.
- The heritage significance of the ground floor is focused on the original exposed concrete structure consisting of surviving columns with splayed heads, ceiling with areas of waffle slab, and floor. Although none of the original partitioning survives, the two staircases at the east end do, providing some legibility of the historic plan form.
- Overall, as an element of the wider the building, the ground floor is considered to be of medium heritage value.
- The modern fabric inserted as part of the c.2000 refurbishment, including partitions, kitchen units/ pods, the bar, WC facilities, back of house spaces, and all M&E equipment is of no heritage interest (see Table 1).



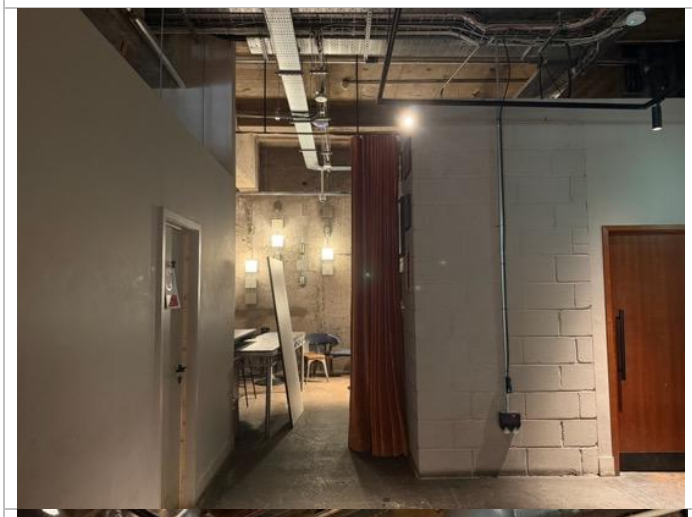


Figures 2 and 3: *Left* – the existing kitchen pods to the south-east of the ground floor. *Right* – the east end of the existing ground floor illustrating the M&E fixtures and exposed concrete structure.

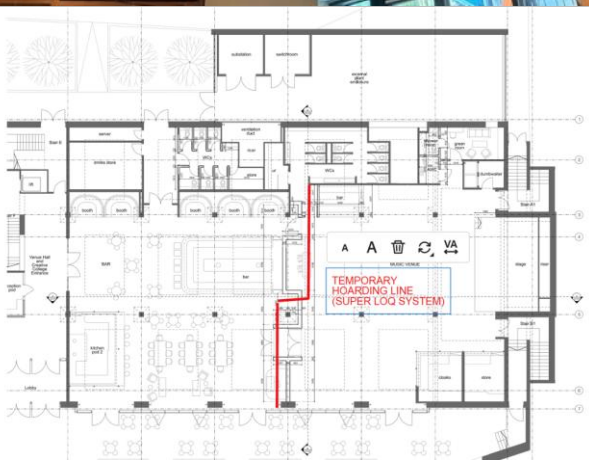
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Table 1: Fabric proposed to be removed as part of soft strip and heritage interest	
Photo	Description & Heritage Interest
	Back of House Pot Wash Area. Remove all equipment and wall and floor finishes. Most of the equipment is freestanding. All services will be isolated, capped and removed back to source where appropriate. No significance
	Urinal/ Cleaner's store The partition and door to the cleaner's store is to be removed. This is effectively a demountable partition and doesn't extend to the concrete soffit. No significance
	Bar The end section of the bar, and all associated equipment, and floor finishes are to be removed. The bar is effectively freestanding and will be carefully dismantled. All services will be isolated, capped and removed back to source where appropriate. No significance

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	Food Concessions The three food concessions to the rear are to be removed, including all equipment, partitions, ceiling slats, wall finishes and floor finishes. These are freestanding and will be carefully taken apart. All services will be isolated, capped and removed back to source where appropriate. The two food concessions to the front are to be stripped out, but partitions to remain. The equipment is all freestanding. No significance
	Green Room The curtain rail and pictures/ fittings to the walls in the green room are to be removed. No significance
	The Stage The stage is freestanding and will be carefully dismantled and removed. The acoustic finishes to the stage, and some of the power and lighting will be stripped out. No significance

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	HVAC Sections / parts of the HVAC systems are to be stripped out/ relocated. Systems that are being relocated will be removed and set aside. Redundant fixings will be left in situ for re-use or carefully removed. Sympathetic repairs will be completed on any removed fixings, subject to approval. Scope to be determined following removal of equipment. No significance
	Temporary hoarding/ partition Temporary hoarding will be installed to separate the bar from the construction site, with access being maintained to the toilets. The hoarding will run to 2.4m high with a thick polythene sheet running from top of hoarding to the concrete soffit. The sheet will be supported and secured using telescopic rods. If required the sheet will be sealed with low-tack tape to prevent dust transfer. No significace/ impact on historic fabric

Heritage Impact Assessment/ Conclusions

The need for Listed Building Consent is set out in Section 7 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which states that *'no person shall execute or cause to be executed any works for the demolition of a listed building or for its alteration or extension in any manner which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest, unless the works are authorised'*.

It will be clear that the current soft strip proposals relate entirely to modern internal fabric that is of no heritage significance. The proposals would not affect the special interest of the building's special architectural or historic interest and consequently Listed Building Consent is not required for the works.

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Appendix A: Official list entry

Heritage Category:

Listed Building Grade:II

List Entry Number:1255052

Date first listed:24-Nov-1995

Date of most recent amendment:26-Apr-2013

List Entry Name:

New Century House, Including Its Attached Conference Hall and Abstract Concrete Relief Wall in the Entrance Piazza

Statutory Address:

NEW CENTURY HOUSE, INCLUDING ITS ATTACHED CONFERENCE HALL AND ABSTRACT CONCRETE RELIEF WALL IN THE ENTRANCE PIAZZA, CORPORATION STREET, MANCHESTER

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District:

Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)

Parish:

Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference:

SJ8421198960

Summary

Office building and attached conference hall, 1959-63, by G.S. Hay, chief architect of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) with Gordon Tait of Sir John Burnet, Tait and Partners.

Reasons for Designation

New Century House, including its attached conference hall and abstract concrete relief wall in the entrance piazza, is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

* Architectural interest: it has an elegant tower and slab composition with a low-lying conference hall incorporating a striking external anodised aluminium frame superstructure with opaque glass-panel cladding that successfully reflects, as originally intended, the mid-C20 status and prestige of the Co-operative group;

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* Design interest: like its neighbouring sister building, the Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) Building, New Century House was one of the first large commercial buildings in England to be air-conditioned and its use of carefully selected external materials, such as black vitreous enamelled-steel panels and anodised aluminium mullions were specifically chosen to withstand air pollution. Other key design features include the conference hall's cubic shape and interior treatment, which maximise its uses and acoustic properties;

* Architect: it was designed by Gordon T. Tait of Sir John Burnet, Tait & Partners, along with George S. Hay of the CWS; both of whom are notable architects with listed buildings to their name;

* Interior interest: despite some later alteration the interior retains many original features and uses high quality materials throughout, including an interesting use of more unusual woods, such as muhuhu (an African hardwood), pearwood, and gaboon veneer; the latter being used in part of the conference hall for its appearance and tonal properties;

* Artistic interest: the striking conference hall interior is enhanced by two large, high-quality sculptured panels depicting lady musicians by Stephen Sykes, whilst an abstract, concrete sculptural screen wall by John McCarthy is a good example of 1960s public art and provides a dramatic focal point within the entrance piazza;

* Group value: New Century House and its attached conference hall form an important group with the neighbouring Grade II listed Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) Building on Miller Street; the buildings being designed by the same architects and built as a single scheme for the Co-operative group. Together the buildings share a strong visual, contextual and stylistic relationship with one another and form impressive skyline features within Manchester city centre.

History

New Century House was constructed in 1959-62, with a conference hall added in 1963, and was designed by George S. Hay, Chief Architect to the Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd (CWS) with Gordon Thomas Tait of Sir John Burnet, Tait and Partners. It was built as the headquarters of the Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd and was leased from the Co-operative Insurance Society who constructed a Headquarters building, known as the Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) Building, on a neighbouring site at the same time; this was also designed by the same architects and is listed separately at Grade II. The main contractors for New Century House (and also the CIS Building) were John Laing Construction Ltd, with A.E. Beer as the structural engineering consultant, and O. Castick, Chief Engineer of CWS as the engineering services consultant. All the original furniture was produced by CWS. The building's conference hall, known as New Century Hall, was opened on 11 May 1963 by Leonard Cooke Esq. OBE JP and President of the CWS.

Sir John Burnet, Tait and Partners, later known simply as Burnet, Tait and Partners, was the early-C20 successor to a series of architectural partnerships first established by John Burnet senior in Glasgow in 1835. Gordon T. Tait took

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over the running of the practice, which had moved to London in the late-C19, from his father, T.S. Tait after WWII and expanded it with the introduction of new partners, specialising in corporate headquarters, schools and housing. Gordon T. Tait's buildings include the Grade II listed Bird's Eye Headquarters, Walton-on-Thames (1961-2). The practice also designed the winning entry for a competition for offices for English Electric in London in 1955, which was widely acclaimed though never built. As Chief Architect for the CWS George S. Hay also designed the Grade II listed Castle House Co-operative store in Sheffield (1964), and was part of one of the earliest salaried in-house architects' departments in the country.

Details

PLAN & MATERIALS: New Century House is bounded by Corporation Street on the north-west side, Miller Street on the north-east side, Redfern Street and Dantzic Street on the south-east side, and Mayes Street and other buildings on the south-west side. The building is set upon sloping ground with the highest point being on the south-east side and the lowest being on the north-west side. The building has a L-shaped plan and a tower and slab composition formed by a 14-storey tower with a 2-storey conference hall attached to the rear left (south-east side) with a double-height first-floor level.

The entire building has a reinforced-concrete construction, with the 14-storey tower incorporating glass curtain-walling with black vitreous enamelled-steel panels set between the floor levels and anodised aluminium mullions. The conference hall has an external anodised aluminium frame superstructure with opaque glass-panel cladding to the first floor and mosaic cladding to the ground floor, which appears as a semi-basement level at the south-east end due to the sloping ground.

The south-west end of the tower's front elevation facing Corporation Street abuts a building known locally as the Old Bank Building (1928), which is separately listed at Grade II; an access doorway has been knocked through on the 5th floor of the tower interior to connect into the Old Bank Building. The sister Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) Building lies to the south-east of New Century House, across Dantzic Street, and is separately listed at Grade II.

EXTERIOR: New Century House consists of a 14-storey rectangular tower and an attached conference hall of 7-bays; the former with shatterproof film placed on top of the windows and glazing. Due to the sloping ground level, the tower is set upon a raised platform with an entrance forecourt in front of the north-west side facing Corporation Street. The main entrance is located on this side of the tower and has replaced doors with a flat-roofed canopy above incorporating replaced signage. Both the ground and first floor levels are fully glazed. A further entrance located to the rear at the junction of Mayes Street and Redfern Street was originally the directors' entrance. The conference hall has a glazed first-floor entrance at the south-east end, which is accessed by a double staircase and has a flat-roofed canopy above. The opaque glazing to the double-height first floor is formed of tall vertical panes set within anodised aluminium frames.

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INTERIOR: internally the tower contains two service cores; that to the north-eastern half contains a dog-leg stair, whilst a larger core to the south-western half incorporates a dog-leg stair, three passenger lifts and a goods lift. Both stairs have simple metal balustrades. Each of the floors above the first floor also contain centrally located toilets. The interior detailing is similar to that of the neighbouring Grade II listed Co-operative Insurance Society Building and was air-conditioned from the first. The main office floors are now mostly open plan and are generally of lesser interest, although some original 'Cunic' partitioning and original perforated metal ceilings, lighting and doors do survive. Most of the office walls were covered with Japanese Grasscloth originally, but this has since been removed.

The main entrance hall, which has a granite floor and retains its original ceiling, was originally completely open plan, but the north-east end now has a later, inserted glazed partition. The walls and columns are clad with white Sicilian marble, except for a later inserted partition wall to the north corner, which has marble-effect paintwork. The passenger lifts are located along the entrance hall's south-west wall and an imperial stair, which has a single flight rising to a half-landing and then dividing into two, is set to the north-east corner of the entrance hall with glass panelled balustrades and a timber rail handrail. The stair leads up to a first-floor crush hall/foyer accessing the main first-floor of the conference hall.

A foyer off the rear of the entrance hall provides access into the ground floor of the conference hall and also contains escalators (now replaced and boxed in), which travel between the ground floor and basement cafeteria; an adjacent lift shaft was added in 2001. Originally there was a curved pre-cast concrete mural by Alan Boyson on a wall facing the foot of the escalators, but this has since been removed. Boyson also produced a ceramic inset top for the first-floor bar in the crush hall, but this has also since been lost. The building has three basement levels with the lower levels containing plant rooms and tunnel access through to the nearby CIS Building. The uppermost basement level has been altered and is generally of lesser interest; it originally contained two cafeteria, a kitchen and assistant managers' dining rooms, but now has a single cafeteria space, a kitchen, a later suite of sports rooms and a storage area. However, one of the cafeteria walls retains an original system of metal tray shelves that rotate on a track into a washing-up area with bronze, curved plastic ends fixed in front of hatch openings.

The ground floor of the conference hall was originally used as the buyers' dining room and could accommodate 700 people. The presence of folding partitions mean that the room can be subdivided and a central corridor with rooms off to each side created. Two original dog-leg stairs are located at each corner of the south-east end.

Above the main entrance hall, to the first floor, is a large crush hall/foyer, which retains its original ceiling and white marble-clad walls. Originally a bar was located at the south-west end of the crush hall, but this has since been replaced by a later bar set alongside the south-east wall. The crush hall leads into a double-height conference hall with an interior designed by Jonathan Green Associates and the CWS in-house team. The hall was constructed to accommodate 1000 people and has a muhuhu (an African hardwood) sprung floor hidden under a carpet covering, and side walls panelled with pearwood, which is grooved and slatted for an acoustic profile and acts as a bass

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resonator. The ceiling is composed of a grid from which prism-shaped, aluminium-sheet resonators filled with cork are suspended; these also reflect light from lamps set into the spaces between the reflectors. Top-lit ceiling panels also exist down each side of the hall. The north-west end wall of the hall is clad with gaboon-veneered chipboard and a stage is set to the south-east end with a plain proscenium flanked by sculptured panels of reinforced polyester with reflective glass inserts, which depict lady musicians and are by Stephen Sykes. The former dressing rooms and property store behind the stage have been converted into a kitchen and are not of special interest.

The top floor of the tower is double-height and originally contained the boardroom and executive offices; the floor is now largely disused. A marble-clad lift lobby retains its original square ceiling lights, and original doors with large, circular brass door handles lead into a large, full-depth meeting room/boardroom with grooved and slatted timber-clad walls (possibly pearwood). The boardroom was originally smaller than it is now and the line of partition walls at each side are still visible (a photograph of 1963 reveals that the walls were originally glazed). It contains original sliding doors concealing a projection screen and an original projection equipment box located on the opposite wall. Two ornamental screens by R.A.N. Mackilligan have been removed. A series of smaller, similarly-styled rooms and reception areas lie to the north-east side with timber-clad walls and columns.

SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: set to the north-east side of the building's entrance forecourt is a concrete sculptural screen wall by John McCarthy with an abstract relief to the south-west side facing into the forecourt. The wall is aligned at a right angle to the building's main entrance and has a shallow rectangular pool (now drained) set in front. The wall includes numerous openings from which water originally flowed into the pool, but the system is no longer in working order. The pool also originally incorporated small fountains.

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APPENDIX B: Methodology

Significance Assessment

The appraisal of significance includes the result of desktop and site surveys, as well as professional judgement. Assumptions have been made based on previous experience and historical research sources where findings have been limited.

The key criteria for assessing the significance of assets is set-out in Historic England's 'Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets', published 21 October 2019. These definitions are in alignment with the NPPF definition of significance and are as follows:

- Archaeological interest – There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

- Architectural and Artistic interest – These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.

- Historic interest – An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

The grading of values is typically considered using three categories: low, medium and high.

Very High / Exceptional: International architectural and historic interest and importance.

This heritage grading relates to the fabric and setting of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Grade-I listed buildings, and Grade-I historic parks/gardens, and battlefields, defined by statute, where the particular site is well represented in the impacted historic environment.

High: National architectural and historic importance and interest.

This heritage grading relates to the fabric and setting of Grade-II* and grade-II listed buildings, Grade-II* and grade-II historic parks/gardens, battlefields, as defined by statute, and Conservation Areas containing very Important buildings where the particular site is well represented in the impacted historic environment.

Medium: Regional architectural and historic importance and interest.

This heritage grading relates to the fabric and setting of Grade-II listed buildings (dependant on character), Grade-II historic parks/gardens and battlefields, designated Conservation Areas, and Unscheduled archaeological sites and landscapes of potential national interest where the fabric and character of the site is well represented in the impacted historic environment.

Low: Local architectural and historic heritage importance and interest.

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This heritage grading relates to the fabric and setting of Locally Listed Buildings (as formally identified by the Council and defined by an adopted Local Planning Policy), and sites identified and recorded as being of heritage interest on the Historic Environment Record, which retain a definable heritage interest as a component of the historic environment.

Impact Assessment

The following grading system has been used for impact assessments in this report.

Substantial adverse: a fundamental change in the appreciation of the heritage asset and its historic context, or setting, involving the degradation of a cultural heritage site of national importance, or the substantial demolition of any grade of a statutorily listed building. This is usually considered as 'substantial harm'. In relation to a conservation area, this is a high test representing a severe impact, where the significance of the asset is either totally lost or drained away, as established in the *Bedford BC v SSCLG38* appeal.

Moderate adverse: a change resulting in a level of impact that noticeably reduces the significance of a listed building or its setting, a locally important building, site, or landscape, but does not totally destroy its value. A moderate adverse impact to a conservation area occurs when development causes a noticeable, negative impact on its overall character or appearance, but does not fundamentally destroy its significance.

Minor adverse: a subtle change to a heritage asset resulting in a low-level, non-fundamental reduction in its significance or setting. Such harm or impact often includes reversible alterations, minor setting changes, or non-intrusive material changes This is usually considered as 'less than substantial harm'.

Neutral: the development would not materially affect the status quo.

Negligible: can be *adverse* or *beneficial* but essentially would have no significant effect on the heritage asset

Minor beneficial: small yet perceptible improvement in the setting of, or condition of, or character of the heritage asset or its setting. It may involve the removal of minor adverse features or be limited to appropriate reinstatement.

Moderate beneficial: a change that appreciably helps to explain the significance and history of the site and surrounding area, ensuring the long-term future and understanding of a heritage asset. This may include the reinstatement of lost historic features and the removal of inappropriate and intrusive later features.

Substantial beneficial: brought about when a development proposal significantly enhances, sustains, or better reveals the significance of a designated or non-designated asset.

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