MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Planning

Delegated Officer Report

Summary of application details

Application reference:	PLA-2026-000487
Application type:	Full planning permission
Proposal:	City Council Development for the installation of external staircase.
Site address:	Land in between Castlefield Viaduct and Aviva Studios Manchester M3 4JQ
Ward(s):	Deansgate
Date application valid:	14 July 2026
Applicant name:	Jared Allen
Agent (if any):	Mr Lee Taylor
Case officer:	Angela Leckie
Recommendation: Approve	
Date of recommendation: 23/09/2026	

The site is bounded to the north by the south elevation of Aviva Studios (which includes part of the Colonnaded Railway Viaduct at the former Liverpool Road Goods Depot (Grade II)) to the west by the eastern end of Victoria Street, the Bonded Warehouse (an NDHA) and Crystal Maze buildings, to the south by the Science and Industry Museums external exhibition space on the Grade I listed viaduct, and to the west by Water Street. The site is in the Castlefield Conservation Area.

The site is split across two levels, Water Street and on top of the listed brick viaduct, aligning to levels 0 and 2 within Aviva Studios. At the Water Street level, the site includes a triangular space between Aviva Studios and the viaduct and a pedestrianised area forming part of the east – west Water Street route. The triangular space is enclosed by a galvanised steel grating fence and gates and contains two service cabinets and a secure storage area associated with Aviva Studios.

A galvanised steel grating balustrade forms the edge of the change in level at the western end, and a galvanised fence and gates forms the secure line to Victora Street at the eastern end. There is an existing change in level of approximately 200mm to the western edge of the asphalt topping, down to the top level of brick arch viaduct. The southern perimeter of the upper level of the site is bounded by an existing galvanised mesh fence to the Science and Industry Museum

At the higher level, the site provides an existing exit route and storage area for Aviva Studios, accessed via Victoria Street. Galvanised ramps bridge the approximately 600mm difference in level between the main performance spaces at Level 2 of Aviva Studios down to an area of asphalt, laid to falls, forming the roof of the Aviva Studio’s WC’s occupying the historic brick arches below.

The north elevation of the listed viaduct, within the proposed site and directly to the west of the Aviva Studios footprint, was modified in the last ten years through consented works to remove an external stair and associated railings and make good brickwork. This section of the viaduct has recessed, matching brick arch infills and an incomplete brick parapet, made safe by the addition of a concrete capping and a galvanised steel grate balustrade. The Water Street bridge abutment has a pronounced brick pier which retains its masonry detailing. CCTV cameras and associated metal conduits are fixed to the brickwork and form part of the current Aviva Studios security system.

Aviva Studios, is home to Factory International, a major cultural venue located on the River Irwell waterfront in Manchester. The building is designed around highly flexible, large scale spaces capable of accommodating a wide range of artistic and performance uses. The 13,350 sqm development includes the Warehouse, a 21 metre high space with capacity for up to 5,000 standing, which can be subdivided by a full height movable acoustic wall. The Hall provides a flexible stage and seating configuration for up to 1,600 seated or 2,000 standing. The Warehouse and Hall can operate independently or together. Additional internal and external spaces support a varied year round programme of cultural activity.

Description of development

Currently, Aviva Studios hosts events with a capacity of up to 5,000 people. The venue has been unable to operate at full capacity since it became operational due to access restrictions onto adjacent land which have impacted on management of means of escape for full capacity operation.

An external stair and ramped walkway is proposed, linking the existing external space on the top of the viaduct at the south of the building to Water Street, to provide an additional external exit route and the opportunity to host events with a capacity of up to 7,000 people in a format that they have not been able to offer to date. The new route would be managed by Aviva Studios events staff who would be present along the route during events requiring this capacity. When not in use during applicable events, the new route is to be secure to prevent accidental or misappropriate use.

The additional exit route would utilise existing space on top of the brick vault viaduct and a triangle of existing space between the south elevation of Aviva Studios theatre, the north elevation of an exposed section of the brick vault viaduct, and Water Street.

The new route would form a continuous element bridging the changes in level between Water Street and the top of the viaduct and responding to the geometry and constraints of its surroundings.

The existing galvanised steel grating fence and gates forming the secure storage area within the triangular space to the north of Water Street would be removed with the remaining maintenance space surrounding the new stair base secured by steel grating gates to match existing fencing associated with the building. The existing galvanised steel balustrade forming the edge protection to the viaduct would be adapted to allow the new stair to land at the upper level. Steel columns supporting the stair would be encased by metal cladding panels forming an inset central plinth. There are no below ground foundations proposed.

At the upper level a continuation of the stair top landing would become a walkway linking to the current top of asphalt level. The walkway would be supported by recessed steel spreader plates, avoiding the need for fixings penetrating the waterproofing layer. Crowd management

railings, pedestrian and vehicular gates would separate the residual storage area at the upper level.

Existing concrete hostile vehicle mitigation cubes will be relocated to suit the new stair and retain functionality, along with existing cycle racks and signage associated with the Water Street rising bollards.

There are a number of constraints that have informed the location and design of the proposed escape stair:

- No fixings are permitted to penetrate the asphalt waterproofing layer and any significant new loads upon it will need to be adequately distributed;

- There are existing services, generally running east – west, beneath the entirety of Water Street, severely restricting the opportunity for new foundations in this area and requiring consideration of distributing loads from any new structure;

- Existing inspection chambers to underground services and hostile vehicle mitigation measures are located within the Water Street zone of the site;

- An existing louvre is located on the south elevation of Aviva Studios adjacent the triangular storage area and approximately 4m above Water Street level. Maintaining sufficient air flow from this louvre will need to be considered along with future maintenance to both the existing Aviva Studios elevations and the listed brick vault viaduct;

- The route needed to take into account the constraints of available safe and operationally feasible routes (including the possibility of utilising adjacent land ownerships); and

- Minimising harm to significance of affected heritage assets.

The application is being considered alongside application no PLA-2026-000628 - City Council Development - Listed Building Consent for the installation of external staircase.

Relevant planning history

Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent (ref no's 114294/VO/2016 and 114370/LO/2016) were approved in January 2017 for the demolition of the Starlight Theatre, a workshop, other structures and the perimeter wall and the erection of a flexible arts and events space. This was to be used for theatre, music, dance, art, other performance and non-performance related events, exhibitions and conferences with ancillary facilities including retail exhibitions and conferences with ancillary facilities including retail and bar uses, offices, administrative and back of house functions, training and educational facilities.

Following this the design was developed in consultation with a specialist consultancy team, contractors and Manchester International Festival (MIF). This resulted in a number of changes and applications were submitted and approved to reflect these amendments application ref no's 119890/VO/2018 and 119892/JO/2018).

Further amendments were approved under 130034/JO/2021: S73 (Minor Material Amendment application) to amend condition 2 (approved dwgs) (Changes to comprise: change to the material and appearance of the theatre cladding system; expansion of the picture window,changes to the back-of-house towers (substitution from channel glass to translucent film and use of curtain wall to part elevation), omission of the cladding to the external truck lift

and alternative corner protection and amendments to align with submission of information in respect of the detailed design of the public realm.

Consultation, notification and publicity responses

Publicity

The application was advertised as affecting the setting of a listed building and affecting a conservation area. A site notice was displayed adjacent to the site and occupiers of neighbouring buildings were notified about the proposals. No representations have been received.

Consultee Responses

Highway Services – No objections

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-Strat1 – Core Growth Area
- Policy JP-Strat2 – City Centre
- Policy JP-J1 – Supporting Long Term Economic Growth
- Policy JP-P1 Sustainable Places
-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 CC4 - Tourism
- Policy CC7 -Mixed Use Development
- Policy CC9 – Design and Heritage
- Policy CC10 - A Place for Everyone
- Policy EN3 – Heritage
- Policy DM1 – Development Management

Saved Unitary Development Plan for Manchester – The following saved UDP Policies are of relevance to this application:

-Policy DC18 – Conservation Areas

- Policy DC19 – Listed Buildings

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) -

Section 7 - Building a strong, effective economy

Section 8 - Ensuring the vitality of town Centres.

Section 14 - Achieving Well- Designed Places

Chapter 20 – Conserving the Historic Environment

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.

Section 72 of the Listed Building Act 1990 provides that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development that affects the setting or character of a conservation area the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Assessment

Principle of Development

The proposals would allow Aviva Studios to operate at the original capacity for which it was designed which would support the wider cultural offer within the City including Manchester International Festival and is therefore supported in principle.

Contribution to Regeneration

Manchester's cultural, tourism and leisure sector has grown significantly in recent years and further support for its cultural offer is required to support the city's growth ambitions. Tourism is one of the key drivers of the City's economic growth. The City attracts a substantial number of domestic and international visitors and it is second most visited city in the UK for staying visits by domestic residents and third for international visitors after London and Edinburgh.

The increase in capacity of Aviva Studios that the proposals would facilitate would support the growth of the city centre as a visitor attraction, domestically and internationally helping to raise the profile of the City as a cultural centre and promoting sustainable economic growth.

In view of the above the proposals would be consistent with PfE policies JP-J1, JP-Strat 1 and JP-Strat 2, Core Strategy Policies CC4, CC7, CC10, SP1 and DM1 and sections 7 and 8 of the NPPF.

Design and Impact on Heritage Assets

The current proposals have emerged through a full options analysis that sought to minimise the level of intervention on the setting of the adjacent listed viaduct and ensure an architecturally cohesive design in relation to the existing Aviva Studios building within the scope of the constraints outlined above. The options considered are set out below:

Option 1 - Science and Industry Museum route east to Lower Byron Street

This route would create a new gated opening within the existing southern boundary fence of Aviva Studios external yard at level 2 leading onto a new raised platform with handrails and lighting. This would run east over the existing ballasted area to the north of the non operational

Science and Industry Museum (SIM) railway line until it meets the existing central SIM cobbled yard. Continuing east, controlled egress through the existing SIM gates would be required onto Lower Byron Street. This option was discounted due to uncertainties regarding securing a permanent route over third party land and the impact on third party plans for their site.

Option 2 - Science and Industry Museum route west to Water Street

This route would create a new gated opening within the existing southern boundary fence of Aviva Studios external yard at level 2 and onto a new raised platform with handrails and lighting running south over the existing ballasted area to the west of the non operational SIM railway lines. A new external stair would be created at the southern edge of the wrought iron colonnade down to the lower portion of the SIM external yard. Continuing west, controlled egress through the existing SIM gates would be required onto Water Street. This option was discounted due to uncertainties regarding securing a permanent route over third party land, access constraints for vehicles into the third party site, and heritage impact on the historic colonnade and the existing space and relationship with the group of listed buildings and structures forming SIM.

Option 3 - Network Rail route south west to Water Street.

This route would create a new gated opening within the existing western boundary fence of Aviva Studios external yard at level 2 and onto a new raised platform with handrails and lighting running south west over the existing ballasted area to the west of the non operational railway line and down the historic stepped ramp onto Water Street. This option was discounted due to uncertainties regarding securing a permanent route over multiple third party land interests and impact on the historic stepped ramp which would require significant modification to provide a compliant and safe route.

Option 4 - Network Rail route west

This route would create a new gated opening within the existing western boundary fence of Aviva Studios external yard at level 2 and onto a new raised platform with handrails and lighting running west over the existing ballasted area to a new stair on the west of Water Street landing, in the external space between Aviva Studios and Ordsall footbridge. This option was discounted due to uncertainties regarding securing a permanent route over multiple third party land interests.

Option 5 - west to Water Street.

This route would provide a stair directly between the western edge of the Aviva Studios level 2 external yard onto Water Street, requiring modification to the current level 2 balustrade and the secure fence line at ground level.

Option 5 is the proposed scheme. This option was preferred as it did not involve use of any third party land and minimises additional crowd management requirements. However as it requires a new stair to be constructed in close proximity to both the existing Aviva Studios building and the historic viaduct there has been a requirement for careful consideration of its design in terms of of its relationship to the architectural quality of Aviva Studios and to affected heritage assets.

The proposed stair cladding will match the colour, material and form of the existing black cladding to the stair enclosure to the west elevation of the Hall to Aviva Studios. The proposed new stair would continue the design language of the existing and adjacent Aviva Studios exit stair enclosure to the new stair through a solid, geometric form, with black metal cladding. This continues the existing colour palette and use at Aviva Studios, where entrance is clearly

signified by vibrant tones and exit is subdued. The proposed stair side elevation panels would closely align to the proportions of the existing panelling on Aviva Studios escape stair enclosure.

The stair and walkway have been designed as a single, continuous element bridging the change in level and responding positively to all of the constraints of the location. The balustrade has been increased in height to conceal the function of the exit stair at Water Street and to allow it to sit comfortably adjacent to Aviva Studios. The balustrade elevations taper simplifying the functional stair geometry within, providing visual interest and access to existing Water Street service inspection chambers.

All elevations, balustrade interior and exterior, and soffit would be clad in large format, metal panels with concealed fixings to ensure a high quality finish befitting of this high profile development. The base of the stair would be enclosed by a large pair of doors concealed by matching cladding panels and minimal visible ironmongery externally.

A condition requiring final agreement of materials and detailing of the panel fixings would be a condition of any consent granted to ensure the quality of the finishes relative to the host building.

In order to mitigate any physical harm to the adjacent listed brick vault structure, the proposed exit route is not attached to it but is supported from Water Street, bridging over the existing parapet, and spanning onto the viaduct top. The ramped walkway at the upper level would be supported by concealed metal spreader plates sat on the top of the brick vaults, no penetrating fixings are proposed. It is also noted that the intervention is ultimately lightweight and reversible.

Whilst the stair geometry maximises the available space between the new stair and the historic structure, in considering the appropriate form and materials for the new stair, the visual impact upon the existing brick elevation has been balanced against the practical need to ensure that the new stair could not be confused as a new entrance to Aviva Studios. This negated consideration of a more transparent design approach.

The current close range views of this section of elevation of the brick vault viaduct will be impacted through being partially obscured by the new stair, however the primary area of interest, namely and abutment detailing would remain unobscured from the majority of viewpoints.

Given the wider scale of the listed viaduct and the localise extent of impact it is considered that there would overall be a low level of harm to the wider setting of the listed viaduct. There would be a negligible level of harm to the significance of the conservation area. Notwithstanding the harm to setting, it is considered that the new external route would within the project constraints outlined above, minimise harm through a design which would sit comfortably in its surroundings, complimenting the bold architecture of the existing Aviva Studios building, while remaining sensitive to, and limiting impact upon, the surrounding listed buildings and structures.

Public Benefits -Where a development proposal would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset the effect on the asset and its significance should be weighed against any public benefits resulting from the proposal.(NPPF Policy HE4)

Public benefits to be delivered through these proposals would principally be derived through allowing a key cultural asset within the City operating a full capacity supporting both the City’s economy and cultural standing in terms of key artistic events such as Manchester International Festival.

Policy Context

Whilst there would be some harm to the setting of the viaduct this would be localised and through the design of the proposals, the harm would be minimised and only visual. The proposals would respect and acknowledges the character and identity of the locality in terms of design, siting, size, scale and materials use in line with PfE policy JP-P1 and would utilise a creative contextual architectural response that would add to the sense of place in line with PfE policy JP-P2. The wider character of the affected heritage assets would be preserved in line with Core Strategy policy CC9.

The overall proposals would continue to preserve and enhance the historic environment, character, setting and accessibility of the buildings; create a well designed place that enhances and has regard to character; would utilise materials and detail which are appropriate and have regard to the character of the surrounding area in line with Core Strategy policies SP1, DM1 and EN3.

There would be no adverse impact on the overall character of the conservation area (Saved UDP Policy DC 18.1. In line with policy DC19.1 there would not be and overall adverse effect on its architectural or historic character of the listed viaduct.

Harm has been minimised as far as possible though mitigation including high quality design, and the sensitive use of materials and the listed viaduct would continue to be conserved in a manner appropriate to its significance. There is a clear and convincing justification for harm to the significance of the affected heritage assets. (NPPF Policy HE6)

Giving appropriate weight to the conservation of the affected assets, there would be a low level of harm to the character and fabric of the listed building and no harm to the character of the conservation area as a result of the proposals. As outlined above that the low level of harm would be outweighed by the benefits (NPPF Policy HE6). The setting of the viaduct would be conserved in an appropriate manner. (NPPF Policy HE9).

Whilst it is necessary to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting any affected Heritage Assets and to preserving any features of special architectural or historic interest which the listed building possesses it is considered that the works would meet the tests set out in policies HE4, HE6 and HE 9 of the NPPF.

On the above basis the proposals are considered on balance to be acceptable and would be consistent with PfE Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2, Core Strategy Policies SP1, DM1 CC9 and EN3, saved UDP Policies DC18 and DC19 and Sections 14 and 20 of the NPPF.

<u>Disabled Access</u>

The means of escape provision for wheelchair and ambulant users is unchanged by the addition of this stair. Wheelchair users will not use the proposed additional exit route and will use existing lifts between the entrance and upper levels within the building and established management plans for those needing assistance, which are designed for the full capacity would continue to operate. A materials condition attached to any consent granted will ensure that there is a contrasting material to the inside of face of the staircase to ensure that there is no trip and fall hazard for disabled people and older people with a visual impairment and that handrails do not retain heat or cold.

On this basis the proposals would be consistent with Core Strategy Policy DM1.

<u>Crime and Disorder</u>

When not in use during applicable events, the new route is to be secure to prevent in appropriate use and antisocial behaviour. Existing external lighting and CCTV coverage to the south of Aviva Studios is to be updated to relocate existing and add an additional camera.

On this basis the proposals would be consistent with Core Strategy Policy DM1.

Conclusion

It is considered, therefore, that, notwithstanding the considerable weight that must be given to the desirability of preserving the building and features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses and to the preservation of setting of the listed buildings and character of conservation areas as required by virtue of S16, S66 and S72 of the Listed Buildings Act, the harm caused would be outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme and the proposals would meet the requirements set out in policies HE4, HE5, HE6 and HE9 of the NPPF and that in view of the above it is considered that the proposed development would on balance be consistent with sections 14 and 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework, PfE policies JP-P1 and JP-P2, Core Strategy Policies SP1, CC9, EN3 and DM1, and saved Unitary Development policies, DC18 and DC19.

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: Approve

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Article 35 Declaration

Officers have worked with the applicant in a positive and pro-active manner to seek solutions to problems arising in relation to dealing with the planning application. This has included on going discussions about the form and design of the developments and pre application advice about the information required to be submitted to support the application.

Conditions attached to this decision

1) The development must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission. Reason - Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following drawings and documents:

(a) MF-RYD-ES-ZZ-DR-A-10-0002-S2-P4-Location Plan;

(b) Dwgs MF-RYD-ES-XX-DR-A-39-0001-S2-P4-Additional External Stair Detail Sections , MF-RYD-ES-ZZ-DR-A-38-0001-S2-P4 Proposed Sections and Elevations., MF-RYD-ES-ZZ-DR-A-30-0003-S2-P4-Proposed GA Plans, MF-RYD-ES-ZZ-DR-A-04-0002-S2-P2-Existing Sections and Elevations, MF-RYD-ES-XX-DR-A-39-0001-S2-P2-Additional External Stair Detail Sections - Sheet 1, MF-RYD-ES-XX-DR-A-39-0002-S2-P1-Additional External Stair Detail Sections - Sheet 2 and MF-RYD-ES-ZZ-DR-A-54-0001-S2-P1-Additional External Stair Assembly; and

(c) Response to Access Comments 15 09 2026.

Reason - To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans. Pursuant to Core Strategy SP1, CC9, EN3 and DM1 saved Unitary Development Plan policy DC18.1 and DC19.1

3) No development that is hereby approved shall commence unless and until samples and specifications of all materials to be used on all external elevations of the development including panel junction and fixing details, contrasting colour to the inner faces of the stair and details of materials to the handrails have been submitted to and approved in writing by the City Council as local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure that the appearance of the development is acceptable to the City Council as local planning authority in the interests of the visual amenity of the area within which the site is located, as specified in policies SP1 and DM1 of the Core Strategy.

4) Prior to the commencement of a phase of development (excluding demolition), a detailed construction management plan for management of Highways impacts outlining working practices for the proposed development construction shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The construction management plans shall include:

o Display of an emergency contact number;

o Communication strategy with residents;

o Details of Wheel Washing;

o Compound locations where relevant;

o Location, removal and recycling of waste;

o Routing strategy and swept path analysis;

o Parking of construction vehicles and staff;

Manchester City Council encourages all contractors to be 'considerate contractors' when working in the city by being aware of the needs of neighbours and the environment. Membership of the Considerate Constructors Scheme is highly recommended. The phase of the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved construction management plans for the duration of the construction parts of the development.

Reason - To safeguard the amenities of nearby residents and highway safety, pursuant to policies SP1, EN9, EN19 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy (July 2012).