Active Travel England

Active Travel England
West Offices
Station Rise
York
YO1 6GA
Tel: 0300 330 3000

Your Ref: PLA-2026-000312
Our Ref: ATE ATE/26/00880/FULL
Date: 22/06/2026

Active Travel England Planning Response
Detailed Response to an Application for Planning Permission

From: Spatial Planning Service, Active Travel England

To: *Jennifer Atkinson - Manchester City Council*

Application Ref: ***PLA-2026-000312***
Site Address: ***Charles Street Multi-Storey Car Park Plot H Sister Charles Street, Manchester, M1 7AR***

Description of development: ***Erection of three interconnected blocks (T1, T2 and T3) of 8, 10 and 38 storeys including ground, plus basement and plant, comprising purpose-built student accommodation with ancillary internal amenity space (Sui Generis) together with flexible commercial uses (Use Class E); landscaping works, highways, access, servicing, infrastructure and other associated works.***

Notice is hereby given that Active Travel England's formal recommendation is as follows:

Conditional approval: ATE recommends approval of the application, subject to the agreement and implementation of planning conditions and/or obligations as set out in this response.

1.0 Background

The application seeks full planning permission for the redevelopment of Plot H within the Sister Innovation District in Manchester City Centre. The proposal comprises 1,041 purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) bedspaces, approximately 612sqm of flexible commercial floorspace and associated public realm, landscaping and access improvements. The development forms part of the wider regeneration of the former UMIST campus and represents the second major phase of the emerging Sister Innovation District.

ATE welcomes the applicant's ambition to create a highly connected, accessible and sustainable neighbourhood which aligns with the wider vision for the Sister masterplan. The Planning Statement identifies a commitment to creating a connected, open and accessible environment that integrates with the wider city through high-quality routes and public spaces. The proposals include a generous pedestrian boulevard along Altrincham Street, a new public square, public realm enhancements along Charles Street and improvements to the wider pedestrian environment. Public spaces and routes are intended to be accessible to all users.

The application demonstrates a strong vision for walking and wheeling. The site occupies a highly sustainable city centre location within comfortable walking distance of Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Manchester, Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester Piccadilly Station, Manchester Oxford Road Station, Metrolink services and a wide range of city centre amenities. The development also seeks to address existing deficiencies within the local environment, including the absence of a footway along the northern side of Charles Street and restricted pedestrian access along Altrincham Street.

ATE considers that the development performs particularly well in relation to accessibility, pedestrian connectivity and placemaking. The car-free nature of the scheme, combined with significant public realm investment, creates an environment where walking and wheeling are likely to be the most attractive modes of travel.

Whilst the application contains a number of positive active travel measures, opportunities remain to strengthen support for cycling through the Travel Plan and future-proofing of cycle parking provision. These matters are not considered fundamental deficiencies but represent areas where the scheme could be strengthened further.

2.0 Summary: Active Travel Assessment

2.1 Trip Generation and Travel Plan

The Transport Assessment forecasts that walking will be the dominant mode of travel associated with the development, reflecting the site's highly sustainable location and proximity to major university campuses and city centre destinations. Vehicle trip generation is minimal and consistent with the proposed car-free nature of the development.

ATE welcomes the applicant's recognition that active travel should form the principal means of accessing day-to-day destinations. The Framework Travel Plan includes a number of positive measures including the appointment of a Travel Plan Coordinator, annual travel surveys, cycle parking utilisation surveys, annual monitoring reports and ongoing liaison with Manchester City Council. The commitment to monitoring travel behaviour and reviewing the effectiveness of measures throughout the life of the Travel Plan is welcomed.

However, whilst the monitoring framework is positive, the Travel Plan currently lacks measurable active travel targets. The only identified target is that residents should not travel to places of study by private vehicle unless required for accessibility reasons. No specific targets have been established for walking, wheeling, cycling or public transport use and there is limited information regarding the actions that would be implemented should monitoring identify lower than anticipated active travel uptake.

ATE considers that the site presents a significant opportunity to achieve exceptionally high levels of sustainable travel and therefore expects the Travel Plan to provide greater certainty regarding the outcomes that it seeks to achieve. Whilst future target setting following baseline surveys is acknowledged, a clearer framework for intervention and review would strengthen confidence that active travel will remain the preferred travel choice throughout the lifetime of the development.

The assessment forecasts only modest levels of cycling demand. Whilst this may reflect current travel patterns associated with comparable PBSA developments, ATE notes that travel behaviour can change over time and therefore considers it important that future cycling growth is not constrained by management or infrastructure decisions made at this stage.

RAG Rating: AMBER

ATE Recommendations:

- Establish measurable targets for walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use.
- Include clear remedial measures and intervention triggers where monitoring identifies underperformance.
- Secure ongoing Travel Plan monitoring and review arrangements.
- Consider additional behavioural change measures that actively promote cycling alongside walking and public transport.

2.2 Active Travel Routes, Off-Site Infrastructure and Access to Public Transport

ATE considers that the development benefits from exceptional access to the wider active travel and public transport network. Manchester Piccadilly Station is located approximately 355m from the site, Manchester Oxford Road Station approximately 310m from the site, whilst numerous bus and Metrolink services are available within a short walking distance. The site achieves a GMAL score of 8, representing the highest level of public transport accessibility.

The Planning Statement identifies a range of existing active travel constraints, including restricted pedestrian access along Altrincham Street and the absence of a footway on the northern side of Charles Street. ATE welcomes the fact that the proposals seek to address these issues through the delivery of a new pedestrian boulevard, continuous footways and enhanced public realm. These interventions will improve the quality, legibility and attractiveness of pedestrian movement through the wider area.

The development is situated within comfortable walking distance of a wide range of amenities, educational institutions, employment opportunities, public transport services and open spaces. Future residents will have direct access to Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Manchester, Royal Northern College of Music, Vimto Park, Sackville Gardens and Manchester City Centre. The site therefore performs strongly against ATE's expectations regarding access to local facilities and sustainable travel opportunities.

Whilst the application primarily relies on existing city centre active travel infrastructure rather than proposing extensive off-site cycling interventions, ATE considers that the surrounding network is capable of accommodating the additional walking and cycling demand generated by the development. The proposed public realm improvements will further strengthen local connectivity and contribute positively to the wider objectives of the Sister masterplan.

RAG Rating: GREEN

ATE Recommendations

- Secure delivery of the proposed pedestrian boulevard, continuous footways and associated public realm works.
- Ensure detailed design provides seamless integration with surrounding walking and cycling routes.
- Continue to identify opportunities to enhance cycling connectivity through future phases of the Sister masterplan.

2.3 Site Permeability and Placemaking

ATE considers that the development performs strongly in relation to permeability, movement and placemaking. The proposals align closely with the wider objectives of the Sister masterplan, which seeks to create a connected, open and accessible neighbourhood integrated with the wider city.

The introduction of a generous pedestrian boulevard along Altrincham Street, a new public square, enhanced public realm and active ground floor frontages will contribute positively towards creating a vibrant and attractive environment. The proposals support natural surveillance, encourage pedestrian activity and create opportunities for social interaction throughout the site.

The movement hierarchy appropriately prioritises pedestrians and reflects the site's city centre context. The car-free nature of the development further reduces the dominance of vehicles within the public realm and supports the creation of high-quality streets and spaces. The proposed commercial uses and active frontages at ground floor level will help to animate the surrounding environment and reinforce the role of the development as part of the wider innovation district.

ATE notes that servicing arrangements will require careful management to ensure pedestrian priority is maintained. However, based on the submitted information, the development demonstrates a strong commitment to place-led design principles and active travel objectives.

RAG Rating: GREEN

ATE Recommendations

- Ensure pedestrian priority is maintained around servicing and operational areas.
- Secure inclusive access measures through detailed design.
- Maintain clear, direct and legible walking and wheeling routes throughout the development.

2.4 Cycle Parking

The application proposes 64 resident cycle parking spaces and 26 visitor cycle parking spaces, including provision for larger and accessible cycles. A cycle maintenance stand and cycle hire facilities are also proposed.

ATE welcomes the inclusion of visitor cycle parking, accessible cycle spaces, maintenance facilities and cycle hire infrastructure. These measures demonstrate a positive commitment to supporting cycling and improving travel choice for residents.

However, the overall quantity of resident cycle parking remains relatively modest when considered against the scale of the development. The applicant's justification is based upon evidence from comparable PBSA schemes and assumptions that future residents are more likely to walk than cycle due to the site's proximity to key destinations.

ATE acknowledges this evidence and agrees that walking is likely to be the dominant travel mode. However, cycle parking provision should not only respond to existing travel patterns but should also support future growth in cycling. Given the anticipated lifespan of the development and ongoing investment in Manchester's active travel network, there is potential for cycling demand to increase over time.

Whilst this issue is not considered severe enough to undermine the overall sustainability of the development, ATE considers that greater flexibility should be incorporated to ensure future cycle parking demand can be accommodated if required. This would provide confidence that the development remains capable of supporting changing travel behaviours throughout its operational life.

RAG Rating: AMBER

ATE Recommendations

- Review the quantity of resident cycle parking provision.
- Ensure all cycle parking complies with the principles and requirements of LTN 1/20.
- Secure flexibility for future expansion of cycle parking provision should monitoring demonstrate demand.
- Ensure accessible cycle parking remains conveniently located and easy to use.

3.0 Conclusion

ATE welcomes the significant investment in active travel infrastructure, public realm and placemaking proposed as part of the redevelopment of Plot H within the Sister Innovation District. The development occupies one of the most sustainable locations in Greater Manchester and demonstrates a strong commitment to walking, wheeling and sustainable travel.

The proposals will deliver a new pedestrian boulevard along Altrincham Street, continuous footway improvements along Charles Street, enhanced public realm, active frontages and a car-free development in close proximity to major public transport interchanges, educational facilities and city centre amenities. The development also addresses existing pedestrian connectivity constraints and contributes positively to the wider objectives of the Sister masterplan.

ATE considers that the scheme performs strongly against the majority of the ATE Planning Application Assessment Toolkit criteria, particularly in relation to accessibility, permeability, placemaking and access to local services and public transport.

The principal areas requiring further attention relate to the ambition of the Travel Plan and the future-proofing of cycle parking provision. These matters are not considered fundamental barriers to the delivery of a highly sustainable development and are capable of being addressed through further refinement and ongoing monitoring.

Overall, ATE considers that the application demonstrates a high level of compliance with the objectives of the ATE Planning Application Assessment Toolkit and the principles of LTN 1/20. Subject to strengthening the Travel Plan and ensuring cycle parking provision

remains capable of responding to future demand, ATE would be supportive of the application.

Active Travel England therefore offers **support subject to conditions**.

Overall RAG Rating: GREEN-AMBER

Summary of Key Requirements

1. Strengthen the Travel Plan through measurable active travel targets and clear remedial measures.
2. Review cycle parking provision and ensure flexibility for future growth in cycling demand.
3. Ensure all cycle parking complies with LTN 1/20 principles and accessibility requirements.
4. Secure ongoing monitoring of active travel mode share and cycle parking utilisation.
5. Maintain the proposed emphasis on high-quality public realm, pedestrian priority and inclusive access throughout detailed design and delivery.