



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 22 April 2025

by **G Bayliss BA (Hons) MA MA MRTPI IHBC**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20th May 2025

Appeal A Ref: APP/B4215/W/24/3352634

The Stables, Wilmslow Road, Manchester M20 5PG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Dharmesh Bhayani, Europium World UK Ltd, against the decision of Manchester City Council.
 - The application Ref is 139172/FO/2024.
 - The development is the installation of air handling equipment at roof level consisting of 7 No. outdoor condenser units, galvanised steel deck supported on galvanised steel posts off existing roof trusses, together with installation of conservation rooflight.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/B4215/Y/24/3352635

The Stables, Wilmslow Road, Manchester, M20 5PG

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Dharmesh Bhayani, Europium World UK Ltd, against the decision of Manchester City Council.
 - The application Ref is 139169/LO/2024.
 - The works are the installation of air handling equipment at roof level consisting of 7 No. outdoor condenser units, galvanised steel deck supported on galvanised steel posts off existing roof trusses, together with installation of conservation rooflight.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A is allowed, and planning permission is granted for the installation of air handling equipment at roof level consisting of 7 No. outdoor condenser units, galvanised steel deck supported on galvanised steel posts off existing roof trusses, together with installation of conservation rooflight at The Stables, Wilmslow Road, Manchester M20 5PG, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 139172/FO/2024 and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following condition:
 - 1) The development shall be retained in accordance with the following drawings and documents:
 - Proposed AC Roof layout plan Ref. 2967AC01 Rev C1-B.
 - Proposed AHU Plant Deck Structural Plan, Sections, Elevations and Indicative Details' Ref. 21-2188/A1/400 T1.
 - Proposed sections Ref. 2967AC02 Rev C1-A.
 - Noise Impact Assessment Ref. 50-550-R1-1 Feb 2022 prepared by E3P.

2. Appeal B is allowed and listed building consent is granted for the installation of air handling equipment at roof level consisting of 7 No. outdoor condenser units, galvanised steel deck supported on galvanised steel posts off existing roof trusses, together with installation of conservation rooflight at The Stables, Wilmslow Road, Manchester M20 5PG, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 139169/LO/2024 and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following condition:
 - 1) The work shall be retained in accordance with the following drawings and documents:
 - Proposed AC Roof layout plan Ref. 2967AC01 Rev C1-B.
 - Proposed AHU Plant Deck Structural Plan, Sections, Elevations and Indicative Details' Ref. 21-2188/A1/400 T1.
 - Proposed sections Ref. 2967AC02 Rev C1-A.

Preliminary Matters

3. There are two appeals on this site. They relate to the planning application and listed building consent for the same scheme. To avoid duplication, I have dealt with them together, except where otherwise indicated.
4. I have made amendments to the description of the development/works in the banner heading above to remove wording which includes detail and narrative that does not relate to the operative part of the development/works. The development/works have already been implemented. I have determined these appeals on this basis and with regard to the plans before me. Having visited the site, I am satisfied that the plans appear to accord with what is on the ground. A similar proposal was subject to appeals in 2022¹ and these are a material consideration which I shall refer to in reaching my decision.
5. The Government published a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in December 2024. I have considered its amendments against the earlier version and against the parties' appeal evidence. However, I have not gone back to the parties for comment, as I do not consider the Framework changes to be substantive or determinative to the outcome of these appeals.
6. I have a statutory duty under sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The Framework advises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Main Issue

7. The main issue in relation to both appeals is whether the development/works preserve the Grade II listed building or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and whether its significance as a heritage asset is preserved.

¹ App/B4215/Y/22/3301586 and APP/B4215/Y/22/3301573

Reasons

Special interest and significance

8. The Stables is a Grade II listed building (Ref.1254972, listed as Former coach house/stable block to north of Parrs Wood House and attached yard wall). The list description mentions that the building dates from the late 18th or early 19th century and is constructed in red brick with a slate roof. It explains that it is arranged in an L-shaped plan formed by a double-pile main block with a receding wing on the south side. It is of two storeys with a symmetrical west front with the 3-bay main range flanked by gabled wings. The list description goes on to describe the arrangement of openings and architectural detail externally, and some internal detail including the visible parts of the roof structure.
9. The property was an estate building serving Parrs Wood House, a Grade II* listed building, and both lay within landscaped grounds. The surroundings of these buildings have considerably changed with the expansion of the urban area, and a large entertainment complex and school have been constructed within the grounds. Alongside The Stables, a 4-storey hotel has been constructed. These developments have affected the legibility of the historic link between Parrs Wood House and The Stables and their wider historic setting. Nevertheless, in many views, The Stables is still seen in the context of relatively open, green space which preserves and reinforces its immediate rural setting, and it is recognisable as a Georgian stable block. The building's historic form, appearance and function remain legible, and it has a high historic, evidential and aesthetic value. These matters make a significant contribution to its special interest and significance.
10. The building was damaged by fire some time ago and much of the upper floors have been rebuilt and parts of the roof replaced. This work appears to have replicated the historic form, construction and appearance of the building. Although some historic fabric has been lost, there is little to suggest that the building's heritage values have been undermined or that its special interest and significance has been diminished to any great extent. Following the fire and subsequent renovation the building was converted to offices in 2004².
11. The appeals relate to Unit 3 which occupies both floors of the central part of the main range. I saw on site that this is divided into several separate offices of varying sizes, with a reception area accessed via a large, glazed archway. Whilst the ground floor offices appear to have reasonably sized windows, I saw that on the upper floor the openings are largely limited to a few small, round windows. Due to the double pile form of the building, its central part is remote from the windows. The upper floor, therefore, appears to have limited natural ventilation potential from the existing openings. The layout is a typically modern, high quality office environment with numerous desks throughout.
12. The condenser units have been installed on the roof within the valley of the main range and provide an air conditioning system. They are supported on a steel platform which fixes to the roof trusses below and a rooflight has been installed to access the equipment. It is suggested that the installation took place in approximately 2021.

² Ref.073153 and 073142 (2004)

13. The Inspector who considered the earlier appeal was concerned that the units would be incongruous on an 18th century building and that their form, colour and appearance would be out of place on the roof. Although the Inspector acknowledged that the equipment did not have to be seen in public views to be harmful, concern was expressed that there was no assessment of where the units would be seen from. The lack of fixing details was also raised.
14. In relation to these appeals, the scheme has been accompanied by an updated Heritage Report (BTP Architects, 2023) which includes photographs showing that the units can only be seen from a few rooms on the top floor of the adjacent hotel. The photographs show the units to be unsightly in the context of the traditional roof form and look incongruous on the historic estate building. It is also from this vantage point that the building can be seen in its more rural setting with a backdrop of trees and other greenery. However, even from this view, the units are not seen at close quarters and are partly masked behind a closer ridge and chimney, and their pale grey colour helps them merge to a degree with the surrounding roof structure. Therefore, even taking account of this single viewpoint, their visibility is limited, although I recognise that harm to integrity is still caused irrespective of public views. I have also reviewed the fixing details and saw on site that internally the fixing to the roof trusses was neat and functional and the rooflight on the inner valley slope was discretely sited.
15. Considering all of the above, despite the additional information which is helpful and diminishes my assessment of the harm caused to the building, I share the previous Inspector's view that the development/works do not preserve the Grade II listed building or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and its significance as a heritage asset is not preserved. Therefore, the expectations of the Act are not met. Paragraph 212 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of proposals on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 213 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of those assets and any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification. I find the harm in the context of the significance of the heritage asset as a whole, in the language of the Framework, to be less than substantial in this instance, a matter not disputed by the main parties. This commands considerable importance and weight and is not to be treated as a less than substantial objection. The Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing the building's optimal viable use.

Public benefits and heritage balance

16. In undertaking this balance, I have taken account of the Planning Practice Guidance which explains what constitutes a public benefit. This states that they should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just be a private benefit. It also explains that reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset, securing its optimum viable use and long-term conservation are heritage benefits.
17. In response to the previous Inspector's decision, the appellant has provided additional documentation to support the retention of the equipment. This includes a Thermal Comfort Assessment (Hydrock, 2023) and this and the Heritage Report include an assessment of alternative mechanisms of temperature regulation.

18. Significant to this appeal is the approval in 2004 for the conversion to offices. The evidence suggests that the approved layout for this part of the building was similar to that now and indicates that the offices could accommodate a significant number of people. Within two years of that approval, consent had been given for air conditioning units in a similar position, albeit only four units³. Clearly, problems were being experienced with temperature regulation even at that time. Although it appears that air conditioning was not installed, the former owner suggests that staff experienced problems with the temperature within the building and portable air conditioning units were used. These units appear to have been noisy and created problems of trailing wires and unsightly ducts hanging out of windows. These units can also be seen in sales brochures. Given my assessment of the windows, their location, the layout and the number of people most likely using the building, it appears that temperature control has been a problem within this part of the building for some time.
19. The Hydrock Report, prepared by specialist engineers, concludes that the building is at risk of overheating. It describes several solutions to mitigate this problem but supports the installed equipment which can both heat and cool the building. The Council do not appear to have commented in any detail on this document and any comments which have been made appear to have been responded to by the engineers. I am satisfied that the technical evidence requested by the previous Inspector has now been provided. Along with the evidence of previous temperature problems within the building, the previous approval for air conditioning units, and evidence of portable devices in the offices, the need for additional temperature regulation is clearly made. It does not appear that the existing openings provide adequate ventilation in themselves for the approved use. Whilst the previous consent for this equipment was made under a different planning policy context and the Framework now requires great weight to be given to any harm, a solution still needs to be found to address the problems experienced. Furthermore, it is reasonable to manage the temperature within the building for all employees especially for those sited further away from windows. Whilst there may be other uses which do not require the temperature regulation sought, this is the use and layout approved by the Council and it is not therefore unreasonable to ensure that the premises provides an appropriate working environment.
20. I have considered the alternative solutions suggested in the reports, but all appear to have their own implications for the integrity or appearance of the building, such as introducing new openings, additional ducting or installing other unsightly equipment. Others, such as louvres or solar films, may be more sensitive but would not appear to provide adequate results. My attention has not been drawn to any other solution which would provide the comfort required to support the approved use and have less harmful results to the significance of the building than the equipment installed. Furthermore, it is suggested that the equipment would also warm the building therefore resulting in less servicing. The equipment would also appear to be reversible should the opportunity arise, unlike some other solutions proposing physical changes to the fabric. I therefore consider that the scheme for which approval is sought is the least harmful of the options presented to the special interest and integrity of the building.
21. In terms of public benefits, the retention of the equipment would help secure the occupation of this part of the building which would benefit its future upkeep and

³ Ref. Ref.077800/FO/2005/S2 and 077809/LO/2005/S2.

use. Retaining the business use would also benefit the local economy. Although this is a private business, the maintenance of a listed building, securing a long-term use and contributing to the wider economy are justifiable public benefits. The need for the installation has been clearly and convincingly justified and I consider that the scheme is a proportionate response and the most appropriate solution to help secure the approved use of the building and ensure its long-term conservation and significance. As such, despite the considerable importance and weight that I must attach to the less than substantial harm that I have identified, those heritage and public benefits attract substantial weight. Moreover, in accordance with the Framework, I conclude that the public benefits outweigh the great weight to be given to the less than substantial harm I have identified. Hence, the proposal would satisfy the requirements of the Act and the Framework.

22. Although the Council has raised concerns regarding the internal apparatus and cabling, this does not appear to have been previously raised by the Council until its appeal statement. In any event, these are not included in the description of the development/works and do not appear to form part of the scheme for which approval is sought. The Council is also concerned that other businesses may seek to install similar units within this building or on other listed buildings. However, my decision is based on the circumstances presented to me, including the planning history, layout, arrangement of openings and evidence of ongoing temperature regulation problems. Also, in this part of the building the equipment is largely hidden within the valley and alternative measures have been thoroughly explored.
23. The development/works therefore satisfy the requirements of the Act and the Framework and comply with Policies EN3 of the Core Strategy for the City of Manchester, Policy DC19.1 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester and Policy JP2-P2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document. These seek to underpin the statutory and policy objectives.

Conditions

24. I have considered the conditions put forward by the Council and appellant. It is not necessary for me to attach a condition relating to the painting of the roof mounted equipment as the existing colour and finish is appropriate for its context. A condition requiring the development/work to be retained in accordance with the approved drawings is necessary to provide certainty.

Conclusion

25. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that both appeals should be allowed.

G Bayliss

INSPECTOR