

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

REPORT FOR RESOLUTION

REPORT TO **THE EXECUTIVE**

DATE **15th FEBRUARY 2006**

SUBJECT **LONDON ROAD FIRE STATION**

REPORT OF **THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Executive with details of a potential redevelopment option for London Road Fire Station, based on the recognition of the Fire Station's importance in the continued redevelopment of Piccadilly. To seek authority for the Chief Executive to work with the building owner and the Piccadilly Partnership to bring the building back into active use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is recommended to:

1. note the contents of the report;
2. endorse the priority which the Piccadilly Partnership has given to the importance of the Fire Station building to the character of the City Centre and the future economic success of the Piccadilly area.
3. endorse in principle the Partnership's imaginative proposals for the future use of the building, which have the potential not only to preserve the integrity of the built-form, but also to create an exciting mix of viable uses and the potential to add significantly to the cultural activities within the City Centre.
4. encourage the Partnership to continue to develop these proposals to report back to the Executive with the presentation of a detailed Business Case.
5. encourage the building owner either to collaborate with the Partnership in the development of these proposals or alternatively, to bring forward his own proposals which not only protect the built-form but also ensure that the building's future usage makes the maximum contribution to the future success of the area.

6. authorise the Chief Executive to wherever possible work with the building owner and the Piccadilly Partnership in order to bring about long-term redevelopment of the building.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE BUDGET

None at present.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CAPITAL BUDGET

None at present.

CONTACT OFFICERS

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

WARDS AFFECTED

All wards with particular implications for City Centre

IMPLICATIONS FOR:	ANTI-POVERTY	No
	EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES	Yes
	ENVIRONMENT	Yes
	EMPLOYMENT	Yes

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The former Fire Station building on the London Road sits at a prominent location directly opposite the new Fairfield Street entrance to Piccadilly Station, within the wider Piccadilly area of the city centre. It is widely recognised that this Grade II* listed building is one of Manchester's most important and distinctive landmarks. The vast scale and skilful architectural detailing of the Fire Station makes the building one of the finest examples of municipal design in England.
- 1.2 The Piccadilly area of the city centre has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, following millions of pounds of public and private sector investment. The Piccadilly Partnership was formed in 2003 as a strategic alliance between the City Council, the private sector and other public sector agencies to underpin and further promote the economic vibrancy of the Piccadilly area.
- 1.3 One of the work priorities of the Partnership since its inception has been the identification of sites within the Piccadilly area where lack of progress on redevelopment is considered a major factor in the area failing to reach its full economic potential, and where, working with the City Council, the Partnership has been able to develop plans to accelerate the emergence of new redevelopment opportunities. The Partnership has supported changes in ownership of the former Employment Exchange on Aytoun Street, which has resulted in the emergence of development proposals for this site which have received planning permission. The Partnership has now identified the sustainable redevelopment of the London Road Fire Station building as being critical to the ongoing regeneration of Piccadilly.
- 1.4 The Fire Station's listed status recognises that the building is of outstanding architectural interest. In 2001, after identifying signs of poor maintenance and decay, English Heritage included the Fire Station on its national Buildings at Risk Register and the Chief Executive of English Heritage has confirmed that action on its protection and development remains a high priority.
- 1.5 Given the strategic position of the Fire Station at the heart of Piccadilly, coupled with its architectural and historical significance, the Piccadilly Partnership believe it is crucial that a new use for the building is found and essential repairs are carried out without delay.

2.0 History and Background to the Fire Station

- 2.1 The building was constructed between 1904 and 1906 and became the headquarters of the Manchester City Fire Brigade for the first half of the twentieth century. It was also home to firemen, a public library, stables, bank, police station and Coroner's Court. Part of the building was continuously occupied until the late 1980s. The Fire Station is currently

owned by the Britannia Hotels group and is believed to be partly vacant and partly used for storage purposes.

- 2.2 The building's inclusion on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk register indicates that there are real concerns over the future preservation of the Fire Station. This coupled with recognition of the potential contribution that bringing this building back into an active use could make to the ongoing transformation of Piccadilly, means that every effort should be made to secure the proper preservation and future redevelopment of this building.
- 2.3 The Council is very concerned about the present condition of the building and its current use. It appears very likely that the building will deteriorate and possible that that it will be irreparably harmed unless action is taken. Contact has been made with the owner of the building to discuss bringing it back into full use in accordance with the proposals outlined at paragraph 3 below. Just prior to issue of this report the building owner has written to the Chief Executive to state that he is not intending to pursue the Partnership's proposals and that he is in a position to develop his own proposals for the Fire Station Building for a hotel and the head office for his hotel group. No detail of these proposals are available as yet.

3. Piccadilly Partnership and Initial Development Proposals

- 3.1 The Piccadilly Partnership considers that bringing the London Road Fire Station back into an active use is fundamental to sustaining the regeneration of the Piccadilly area. The Partnership is fully committed to securing the continued transformation of the area through the sustainable re-use of the building stock and heritage. The Partnership therefore fully recognises the importance of the magnificent Fire Station building, particularly given its prominent position at the gateway to Manchester City Centre.
- 3.2 The Piccadilly Partnership is committed to working with the owner and the City Council to transform this building from its currently under-used and neglected condition. On behalf of the Piccadilly Partnership, Argent Estates Ltd has produced initial development proposals for the Fire Station. The proposals present the City Council with a possible option for developing an exciting concept for the building's re-vitalisation.
- 3.3 The 'Fire Station- Reimagined' proposals (copies of which have been circulated with the Executive agenda) set out how this currently dormant building could be transformed, with the integrity of its existing built-form fully protected, into a new, unique and vibrant cultural destination for Manchester. The proposals present a vision for the building, based on the creation of a music hub, with the aim being quite literally to create the place where **Manchester Music Lives**. The building would become a place where music exhibitions, education and

performance sit alongside music retailers, recording studios, music events and a boutique hotel. The Fire Station would be home to a diverse portfolio of music related popular culture and entertainment elements which are summarised below:

- **Music and Event Venue**

The main Fire Station music and event venue would sit right in the heart at of the building, in the courtyard and former fire engine hall. The space would be entirely flexible, supported by state-of-the-art lighting and sound systems and entertain the public with a wide range of music performances.

A glazed courtyard would enable the Fire Station to host an exciting programme of concerts and events across a range of formats, from standard 'theatre-style' seated concerts, to standing-only events.

- **Music Academy and Archive**

The proposals suggest that a Fire Station Academy could offer a wide range of community courses at all levels, such as music production, sound engineering and recording, studio workshops, schools/education programmes, DJ courses, local youth group sound recording studios, contract law, royalty, publishing and negotiating record contract seminars.

- **The Recording Studios**

The proposals outline that the main Recording Studio at the Fire Station would feature an industry standard facility with live room and control room, together with a number of smaller suites. It is intended that the Recording Studios would also work very closely with the Fire Station Academy in relation to music tuition courses.

- **Private Members Club**

Facilities for this exclusive private members club would include a bar, restaurant, dance floor, five meeting rooms and state-of-the-art conference facility.

- **Music Market**

The Fire Station Music Market is intended to be an energetic 'hub' where people can shop, eat, relax and enjoy music in the Fire Station courtyard. The key elements of the Fire Station Music Market are likely to include around six formal music shops from mainstream to specialists.

- **Boutique Hotel**

The Fire Station boutique hotel would have 100 high quality, interior designed rooms and suites. All rooms will be acoustically insulated and air-conditioned for the comfort of guests. Suites would also be available as serviced apartments.

- 3.4 The proposals are considered by the Partnership to be viable and can be sustained on a wide equity base involving different partners, possibly including existing Partnership members, as well as the Council. The Partnership are keen to further develop the concept and through Argent are prepared to underwrite the considerable cost of producing a detailed planning application, listed building consent and full feasibility study, including market assessment, in full consultation with the Council and English Heritage. They are understandably anxious to refine the proposals in collaboration with the wider cultural sector, as well as the Council's Cultural Strategy Team, to ensure that the final mix of uses adds significant value to existing cultural activities and facilities within the City.
- 3.5 A copy of the proposals has also been sent to the building owner with a request for a meeting to discuss them, or alternatively seeking any comments on the proposals. Just prior to issue of this report the current owner wrote to the Chief Executive stating that he is now in a position to move forward with the development of his own proposals for the Fire Station but no detail on these has yet been received.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The Fire Station building on London Road is a building of significant historical and architectural importance to the City. Given its status as an acknowledged 'Building at Risk' and its prominent position within the newly revitalised Piccadilly area of the city centre, it is critical that a sustainable active use is found for the building.
- 4.2 The Chief Executive believes that the work of the Piccadilly Partnership in identifying the importance of the Fire Station building to the character of the City, as well as determining a future use which is important to promoting the economic success of the Piccadilly area, is both appropriate and timely. The rapid change in the economic profile of the Piccadilly area, including the development of a mix of destination uses, increases the potential for now being able to bring forward a sustainable use for this building.
- 4.3 It is hoped that the emergence of the Partnership's proposals will encourage the current owner of the building to either to collaborate with the Partnership in the further development of the proposals leading to the submission of a planning application, or bring forward his own alternative proposals which not only vouchsafe the integrity of the existing building but also ensure that its usage can make a full contribution to the future success of the area.
- 4.4 The Chief Executive invites the Executive to:
- Endorse the priority which the Piccadilly Partnership has given to the importance of the Fire Station building to the character of the City Centre and the future economic success of the Piccadilly area.

- Endorse in principle the Partnership's imaginative proposals for the future use of the building which have the potential not only to preserve the integrity of the built-form, but also to create an exciting mix of viable uses and the potential to add significantly to the cultural activities within the City Centre.
- Encourage the Partnership to continue to develop these proposals to report back to the Executive alongside the presentation of a detailed Business Case.
- Encourage the building owner either to collaborate with the Partnership in the development of these proposals or alternatively, to bring forward his own proposals which not only protect the built-form but also ensure that its future usage makes the fullest contribution to the future success of the area.

Detailed recommendations appear at the front of this report.

5. Implications for Key Council Policies

- 5.1 **Equal Opportunities:** the redeveloped building should provide barrier free access provision.
- 5.2 **Environment:** this Grade II* listed building is in key location opposite Piccadilly Railway Station, which provides visitors with a first impression of the City. The high quality re-development on this building will secure its proper preservation and significantly contribute to raising the profile of the wider Piccadilly area.
- 5.3 **Employment:** this site offers opportunities for new job creation.

**SIR HOWARD BERNSTEIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**