Dear Emily

Library Walk Link: Application ref. 099352, 099353 and 099354 – Response to Representations Submitted to Manchester City Council

We write on behalf of our client, Manchester City Council (Town Hall Complex Transformation Programme), in respect of three no. applications (ref. 099352, 099353 and 099354) which are currently pending determination by Manchester City Council.

We have now had the opportunity to review the representations submitted to date in respect of the above applications. This letter provides a co-ordinated response from the Project Team and is focused on a number of recurring issues.

1. The Need for Library Walk Link

Manchester’s vision, shared with our partners and outlined in the Community Strategy, is that by 2015 it will be a city of opportunity that is welcoming and inclusive, with neighbourhoods of choice and services that meet and exceed the needs of all residents. To achieve this vision, the Council is committed to putting customers at the heart of all that it does, with an infrastructure that can efficiently and effectively support services.

Combining the physical refurbishment of the Town Hall Extension and Central Library with the transformation vision not only provides the foundations to deliver excellent customer services within the newly formed Customer Service Centre, but will also transform the way our library service is delivered.

The Town Hall and Library Transformation Programmes are ambitious programmes which will not only see some of Manchester’s most loved buildings sympathetically restored to their full glory but will also significantly transform the way services are delivered to customers and the way in which Council staff work.
**Customer Service**

Customers have expressed their desire to access all Council Services through a single point of contact. This approach has been adopted in the decant Customer Service Centre at One First Street. Here the old disparate counter services in the Town Hall Extension have been moved into an integrated open plan environment where customers can access any Council Service including a small lending Library.

The new Customer Service Centre in the Town Hall Complex will continue this theme and provide a modern, welcoming space for the diverse customer base and empower staff to deliver a high quality customer experience. It will consist of high quality visitor facilities where customers’ needs will be quickly identified and efficiently handled. Customer service will be delivered seamlessly alongside Library services with multi channel access to Council services. This will include self service portals, self supported information points, generic advisor desks, meet and greet points, drop off facilities and specialist advisor desks, some of which will take place in Central Library.

Over 200 customers a day will be looking to use the accessible PC workstations provided in both buildings. Many customer using workstations in the Central Library will then travel to the Town Hall Extension for more information and advice from the customer services staff and we need to ensure this occurs as seamless as possible.

**Library Services**

Central Library, one of the city’s most well loved buildings was already the UK’s third busiest library and visitor numbers are expected to double to 2m when the refurbished building reopens in 2013/14.

The Library Service will be delivered in both the Central Library and the Town Hall Extension. A modern, welcoming space will be provided with high quality visitor facilities where customers’ needs will be quickly identified and efficiently handled. Library services will be delivered seamlessly alongside customer services. This will include self service facilities, self supported information points, meet and greet points and drop off facilities.

**Shared Facilities**

Central Library and the Customer Service Centre in the Town Hall Extension have been designed as a single space with customers able to receive either Service in either building.

There will be self-service accessible PC workstations in the St Peters Square cafe area, the Rates Hall and on the ground floor of Central Library, therefore a link would connect these allowing customers to locate a self-service PC more easily and allow the Council to staff the areas more effectively.

The main catering provision in the complex will be the St Peters Square cafe in the Town Hall Extension, and a ground floor link would improve customer accessibility to this from Central Library.

There is a proposal to use the customer service space within the Town Hall Extension as a library study area outside of normal opening hours. Connection at ground floor level would significantly increase the number of potential customers that have quick and easy access to this space.
A link between Central Library and the Town Hall Extension could also provide a space for self-service equipment accessed by customers outside of normal opening hours; this is particularly important for some service users e.g. homeless families.

A ground floor connection would improve the ability of staff to move across the complex to respond to changing customer demands in Central Library, the Rates Hall, extended library and the Customer Service Centre.

Whilst we refer to a link between Central Library and the Town Hall Extension the reality is that this would become a shared reception and customer access point to both buildings, visible from St Peters Square and providing easy access to those who are walking from the Mount Street end of Library Walk.

**Customer Entrances**

Central Library has a very prominent entrance that leaves visitors in no doubt as to where they access the building. However, delivery of Library services will extend into the refurbished Town Hall Extension and whilst there will be a link below ground level customers are unlikely appreciate this and either miss the opportunity to enjoy those services or leave Central Library and walk outside to the Town Hall Extension. This neither meets the Councils vision of One Council or the customer’s requirement to have services that are easy to find. There is a real risk that customers will not access services provided because of the current design constraints.

A survey has shown that a customer entering Central Library and being redirected to the Town Hall Extension would have to walk 161m if they went outside and back in. The weakness of this long route includes a difficult journey up and down several ramps, bottleneck through the narrow portico entrance, exposure to inclement weather and a significant dis-incentive to integration of council services.
The alternative of going outside is to go down to the basement and back up into the Town hall Extension which still results in a walk of 151m. The long journey is impeded by lifts and doors and is a confusing route, which many customers will find difficult. The lack of a visual connection between services discourages inter-connection. This route presents a significant barrier to the integration of services.

Library Walk Link

A link between Central Library and the Town Hall Extension would result in a single accessible space for customers to move effortlessly between both buildings. It is estimated that up to 1m of the 2m visitors would cross between both buildings.

The ground floor of the Town Hall Extension will have 50 publically accessible PC workstations, the lower ground floor, which is the extended Central Library will have a further 40/50 accessible PC workstations and Central Library will have a further 50 accessible PC workstations across 5 floors. Our business strategy relies on customers being able to access these workstations across both buildings.

A link would also provide a prominent single entrance to both buildings allowing customers to easily navigate their way to the service they require. The flow diagram below clearly indicates why the link is so important in allowing customers to move easily between the different destinations on the
ground floor of both buildings. The vision is ‘one council’, ‘one service’, and ‘one building’ complex. A ground floor link between Central Library and the Town Hall Extension would reduce the distance a customer would have to walk between them to only 44m. This would allow seamless and level transition between buildings dramatically reducing the length and difficulty of the journey. The proposed link would provide general openings to facilitate access. The new visual link would create a simple intuitive connection and an awareness of the full variety of services available encouraging discovery between services and spaces.
The proposed Metrolink Second City Crossing route running through St Peter’s Square would increase the number of trams to 45 per hour and this will impact on the number of staff and customers accessing the Town Hall Extension from the Square. It is now clear that without a link building there will be congestion at the St Peter’s Square entrance with staff and customers at particular periods during the day. The Council are exploring different options of managing the additional numbers of staff and customers that are expected at this entrance but they also need to manage security and accessibility issues.

The approach to bridging two buildings has been adopted in both the private and public sectors, with examples at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel on Peter Street, where the old Free Trade Hall has been linked to a new Hotel extension and at the Manchester Art Gallery on Mosley Street, where the existing Art Gallery was linked to a new extension and the Athenaeum. The Manchester Art Gallery is particularly relevant to the Town Hall Complex with the link building generating significant benefits to customers as they move between three separate buildings.

**Improve overall means of escape conditions from the Central Library**

The stair within the new vertical intervention core within Central Library is only designated as a circulation stair. Creating a new opening between Central Library and Library Walk would allow this stair to be designated as an escape stair. The stair would serve all levels of the building and alleviate demand on the existing escape stairs during a fire scenario. Escaping customers are also likely to try to leave a building the same way as they entered. Therefore, allowing the stair in the new vertical circulation to be used for escape will cause less confusion for customers during an evacuation scenario.

It can be designated as an additional fire route as it allows exit directly from the core to outside through the new proposed link building. The currently proposed route through Shakespeare Hall is not fire separated from adjoining floors and therefore cannot be designated. The current
arrangement however is acceptable to MCC building control through the use of Stairs C&D as escape routes. These routes however are not appropriate for Mobility Impaired Persons (MIPs).

At ground floor, the current exit provisions are not of sufficient capacity to allow all of the occupants to evacuate within the 2.5 minutes as recommended by contemporary fire safety guidance. Therefore, the current approach for the building will lead to extended evacuation times from the ground floor. If a new opening from the Central Library into Library walk was created, this would create an additional exit from the ground floor and clearly reduce the evacuation times.

The Stage D Fire Strategy for Central Library identified that for normal day to day occupancy, the first floor of the building is provided with sufficient exit capacity. The potential for the Great Hall on the first floor to be used for any special events (book signing, events etc.) which leads to the first floor being more densely populated than under normal circumstances was not considered as part of the fire strategy. If the Great Hall is used for special events, it is likely that extended evacuation times will be exhibited on the first floor. Provision of an additional escape route from the first floor of the building will help to reduce the evacuation times from that level. This will provide greater flexibility for the use of the Great Hall and allow more dense occupancies to be located on the first floor than the normal day to day occupancies. The same flexibility advantage applies to the upper floor levels.

Currently there is no level access/egress from the ground floor level of the building. The new vertical circulation core will contain an evacuation lift for the evacuation of MIPs. However, the current strategy for evacuation of MIPs (via the new vertical circulation core) is to take them to basement level, from where they can evacuate through the Town Hall Extension. This is a convoluted route and is not ideal when compared with conventional escape procedures (evacuate to ground floor and then out of the building). A direct opening from the Central Library into Library walk would mean that MIPs escaping via the new vertical circulation core would be able to evacuate direct at the ground floor level of the building. This simplifies the escape strategy for escaping MIPs.

**Impact of Not Providing a Link**

Manchester City Council is committed to offering access to all of its Services across the Town Hall Extension and Central Library. This requires a physical link between the buildings at ground floor level.

If a link is not provided between the two buildings the Council will have to duplicate Service delivery in the Town Hall Extension and Central Library. This would not allow the transformation of Service delivery that the Council has planned and would duplicate costs at a time when budgets are being cut. The Council cannot justify the on-going revenue costs of duplicating customer services in both buildings. In addition significant design changes would be required in the Central Library to accommodate additional meeting rooms for interviews with customers on the ground floor.

**2. The Principle of Development**

The client and design team understand the nature of Library Walk and recognise it as a unique and distinctive element of the Manchester cityscape, one that is valued by many as not only a route but
also an experience. As such the project team has spent considerable time developing the link structure before arriving at the proposals presented with the planning application.

The proposals are for the careful insertion of an independent element within Library Walk that maintains the legibility of the overall volume of the space and is subservient to the architectural qualities of the existing and much larger Central Library and Town Hall Extension.

Open to all, this new link will bring many more people through Library Walk than currently enjoy the space as they use it to transfer between different public services available in the Central Library and the Town Hall Extension and as a supplementary entrance foyer to the overall complex. This increased vitality will greatly enhance the security of all those using the space.

The link will be built to the highest contemporary standards and is designed to be unique to its situation. The undulating ceiling that relates in form to and reflects the materials of the adjacent arches of the neighbouring buildings, will ensure the link will be an additional exciting element in the sequential movement of people from St Peters Square to Albert Square and between either building. Open from early morning to well into the evening, people will be able to continue using the route through Library Walk as a thoroughfare, view the buildings on either side, and witness the changing light conditions as they did before the present refurbishment works.

The whole of Library Walk will be enhanced through new paving related to that within St Peter’s Square, and enhanced lighting, seating and public art, all of which are being developed as part of the St Peter’s Square works to create a coherent public realm.

The link proposal has been most carefully designed to appear as an independent element and not as an extension to the buildings on either side. Reducing the height and scale of the link has also minimised the loss of original fabric through minimal connections to the listed buildings on either side. It is further considered that the link will increase the use of Library Walk through its role as an additional means of entry to the Central Library and Town Hall Extension, and as a result many more people will enjoy an enhanced appreciation of this part of the city centre.

Throughout the design development of this element of the overall project, English Heritage has been consulted. Their advice and guidance has helped to inform the design of the link and its minimal connections to the listed buildings.

We also welcome the comments from Greater Manchester Police – Design for Security, who confirm they have no objections to the proposed scheme.

Manchester City Council and the Design Team have liaised with Greater Manchester Police Authority (both with Architectural Liaison Officers (ALO)) and Anti Terrorist Unit) during the design development of the glazed link building.

Historic information held principally by Manchester Town Hall Complex Security Services advised a serious assault had taken place along Library Walk and there were frequent instances of Anti-social behaviour at night (urination).

Advice received from the Architectural Liaison Officer suggested the proposals offered a number of benefits:

• Genuine security benefits by shutting down space at night
• Much improvement over existing situation

On this basis the Design Team and Manchester City Council were confident of support for the proposals.

It is acknowledged that this application has followed previous approvals for the Town Hall Extension and Central Library including a subterranean link between the two buildings. It was not possible to submit this application at the same time, simply because at the time, design development had not considered in detail a ground floor link between the two buildings on Library Walk. It was only after the scheme had significantly evolved for the Town Hall Extension and Central Library that consideration of a link began, taking into account the significant additional public benefits through the provision of better services that the Link would assist in providing.

The team was however aware of the significance and value of Library Walk in heritage and cityscape terms and therefore spent a considerable length of time developing proposals that met the functional requirements of a link while respecting and responding appropriately to the sensitive context of Library Walk. The long development period is the reason that these proposals were not submitted at the same time as those for the Central Library and Town Hall Extension.

3. Harm to the Significance of Central Library, Town Hall Extension and St Peter’s Square and Albert Square Conservation Area’s

The representations received all confirm the view of the client and design team that Library Walk is a unique and distinctive feature of the Manchester cityscape. The client and design team have worked with English Heritage at the outset so that the design of the link and connections to the two listed buildings on either side could benefit from their advice and guidance.

Using drawings and through detailed discussion, great care has been taken to design the link within Library Walk. It has a plan area large enough for its function and maintenance and is of a height and proportion appropriate to its location between the Central Library and Town Hall Extension. The link also stands away from the façades of the two listed buildings so their curved façades can be seen and only lightly touches them with minimal connection. The link is also set back from St Peter’s Square so it is partly hidden by existing buildings, including the projecting stair of the Town Hall Extension, and is not visible from Mount Street. The link is purposefully small and plain in comparison with the impressive size and monumental form of the two listed buildings and therefore it is unlikely to have any visual impact on the appearance of either building or their overall setting. Being low in height and curved in plan the link will not contrast with the more visible and much longer sweeping curves of the two taller listed buildings, nor will it change the canyon-like experience of being in Library Walk or prevent anyone walking through the open space looking upwards to view the sky.

A number of the representations have expressed concern that the link will cause considerable harm to the listed buildings and conservation areas, and is a duplication of a route between the buildings being created in the basement as part of the Transformation Project. English Heritage in their letter of support have acknowledged that as the design of the main projects developed a ground floor connection between the buildings was found to be essential in order to provide improved access and that it would be unfair to impose far greater travel distances onto disabled people.
Having read and considered the same application documents for the link that have been made available to everyone through the Planning Portal, English Heritage has confirmed they are content that the public benefits of the link in Library Walk outweigh the harm to the two listed buildings, which is minimal.


Some of the responses comment that it is inappropriate to use a new stylistic and material ‘language’ within the existing heritage context presented by the Town Hall Complex. The design team believe that the use of a contemporary language to design a modest object offering both functional benefits and an outward indication of the substantial physical and organisational changes being made within the complex is appropriate. This was outlined in the Design and Access Statement, accompanying the applications at section 7.7:

“The glazed link proposal will offer enhanced functionality, and, in creating a new vibrant dynamic space closely related to its physical context, a unique experience for service users, staff and visitors to the city. Its nature as a distinct foyer ensures that the forms of the two original buildings together with their external spaces can still be-appreciated, while also ensuring visitors will still be able to enjoy the entry sequences of the original buildings as designed in the 1930s.

As a significant new entrance to the Town Hall Complex, the design is intended to match the quality of the existing entrances while providing a contemporary proposal that is representative of the changes in technology, and attitudes to local government and service provision, in the period between the design of the link and the design of the Central Library, the Town Hall Extension and the original Town Hall.”

The linked public spaces can be read as a series of negative volumes within the cityscape that provide a setting for various significant monuments and art works, such as the Albert Memorial, the Cenotaph and St. Peter’s Cross, which have all been added over time. They also provide space for public events and are a significant social amenity.

The concept of a structure set within these spaces as a new event is therefore consistent with this historic pattern and does not attempt to re-describe the form of the public spaces. Moreover, by providing for continued linkages between these areas the new link will not affect their primary pattern of use.

In designing the link, significant regard has been shown to how the proposals for Library Walk will impact the surrounding heritage assets: the Central Library, the Town Hall Extension, St. Peter’s Square and Albert Square. The lightweight connections to the existing adjacent buildings also aim to minimise physical interventions to the historic fabric and to provide a clear reading of the nature of the contemporary changes that have occurred.

The design process considered several approaches to the overall form and roofing of the link. Following the establishment of an independent curvilinear pavilion both glazed and solid roofs were investigated. A glazed roof was rejected primarily for the following reasons: -

- The supporting structure would have been complex and drawn attention away from the desired simplicity of the structure and the complexity of the context; and,
• A glazed roof would require very regular cleaning to ensure clarity of views.

The undulating reflective surface selected allows for:
• The structure to be concealed within the roof form;
• The form of the roof to be able to respond to the curvilinear arch forms on either side of Library Walk;
• The surrounding materials to be reflected in the roof surface.

This process underwent significant testing and discussion with English Heritage and represents the most appropriate design solution for the Link.

5. Access from St Peter's Square to Mount Street and Albert Square

A key concern highlighted in a number of the representations is that Library Walk will be closed to the public as a result of the proposed glazed link. However, this is not the case. As set out in the planning application submission, Library Walk will be maintained as a public route between Mount Street and St Peter’s Square during the hours of 6am and 10pm. It is acknowledged that Library Walk is an existing thoroughfare, but it is not considered that its closure during the late evening and early morning period will impact significantly on its use and people will still have sufficient time to be able to enjoy and experience views of the two listed buildings, the space between them and look up to the sky. There are significant community safety concerns about the use of Library walk at night because of the previous serious assault and anti-social behaviour.

The submitted Design and Access Statement makes clear that the doors providing access into the link and the route along Library Walk between Mount Street and Albert Square will be open daily between the hours of 6am and 10pm. The existing permeability of the area will therefore be retained during the periods when Library Walk is most in use. Should it be necessary for an alternative pedestrian route to be found during the late evening and early morning period when Library Walk is closed, there are equally commodious routes along Peter Street, Lloyd Street and Princess Street.

6. Need for and Appropriateness of Mount Street Gates

A number of the representations submitted question the need for and appropriateness of the proposed gates at the Mount Street end of Library Walk. In term of need, the installation of the gates is required to avoid the creation of a dead-end during the hours when Library Walk Link is closed to the public between 10pm and 6am. Such a situation would have security and safety issues based on the previous serious assault and anti-social behaviour and it is proposed to shut Library Walk as a thoroughfare when the link building is closed.

The gates are to be subject of a planning condition should this application be approved. The client and design team are committed to providing gates that will continue and reinforce the tradition of quality and detail set by the gates incorporated into the existing Town Hall by Waterhouse, interpreted in a contemporary manner.
7. Equality Impact Implication

A full Equality Impact Assessment is being carried out for the Town Hall Transformation Programme.

8. Other Matters

We note that concern has been raised over the consultation period for the applications being shortened by a double bank holiday. The applications were submitted and validated on 14 May 2012, which allowed sufficient time for statutory consultees and interested third parties to submit any representations.

Library Walk Link will provide, in addition to the original entrances, a recognisable single entrance to both the Central Library and the Town Hall Extension, allowing customers to receive the full benefit of the public services on offer in both buildings. Achieving connectivity between the Central Library and the Town Hall Extension is key to Manchester City Council’s vision of a single complex delivering a wide range of Council services.

The scheme will link visually and physically the Central Library and the Town Hall Extension and has been designed in such a way that it is sensitive to the significance of the space and the fabric of both Grade II* listed buildings. It has been demonstrated in the applications that the proposal will not have a negative impact on the preservation and enhancement of the surrounding listed buildings and the Albert Square / St Peter’s Square Conservation Areas as heritage assets.

Furthermore, the scheme will maintain Library Walk as a public thoroughfare linking St Peters Square with Mount Street, whilst improving the environment and enhancing the experience of this major public space for all who use it. We would therefore urge officers and Members to support this application.

We trust the above response is helpful and would be grateful if you take account of these comments in preparing your report to Committee. However, should you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Nathan Matta
Associate Director

cc Dave Carty (MCC Transformation Team)
Gillian Ramsbottom (MCC Transformation Team)
Amelia Edwards (MCC Transformation Team)
Tim Wenham (Ian Simpson Architects)
Neil Cooke (HOK)