

# HULME HIPPODROME

## Hulme, Manchester

Heritage & Urban Design Feasibility  
Study

Undertaken by TheUrbanGlow  
Design & Heritage Ltd 2025





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**TheUrbanGlow are HESPR Registered Service Providers for the Historic Environment**

2025  
TheUrbanGlow Design & Heritage  
www.urbanglowdesign.com

## INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to further elaborate on the opportunities for sustainable regeneration of this part of Hulme whereby the Grade II Listed Hulme Hippodrome and Playhouse could act as significant catalysts to provide a community, social and historical focal point that could enhance a strong sense of place. It very much builds upon and assesses the indicative ideas put forward by the **Save Hulme Hippodrome** group and attempts to assess their feasibility and impact in heritage terms.

**TheUrbanGlow Design & Heritage Ltd** were asked to provide an independent assessment of the building within its past, present and future contexts. Funded by **Theatres Trust**, this document was produced in consultation with Save Hulme Hippodrome and aims to reiterate the heritage significance of this building as well as to provide a possible framework for future regeneration of the wider area, using both the Hulme Hippodrome and the adjoining Playhouse theatre as focal points.

Much of the following is focussed upon a robust understanding of the place with the intention to help drive discussion and provide potential opportunities for both the Listed Buildings and adjoining sites. This work is not intended to be prescriptive, rather, it provides a high level Urban Design and Heritage Analysis that will, hopefully, enable landowners to see the very real potential of this part of Hulme to re-stitch the fine grain patterns of development that once existed, whilst, at the same time, enabling the Hulme Hippodrome to rise once again as a community focal point and a valuable, and much loved heritage asset.

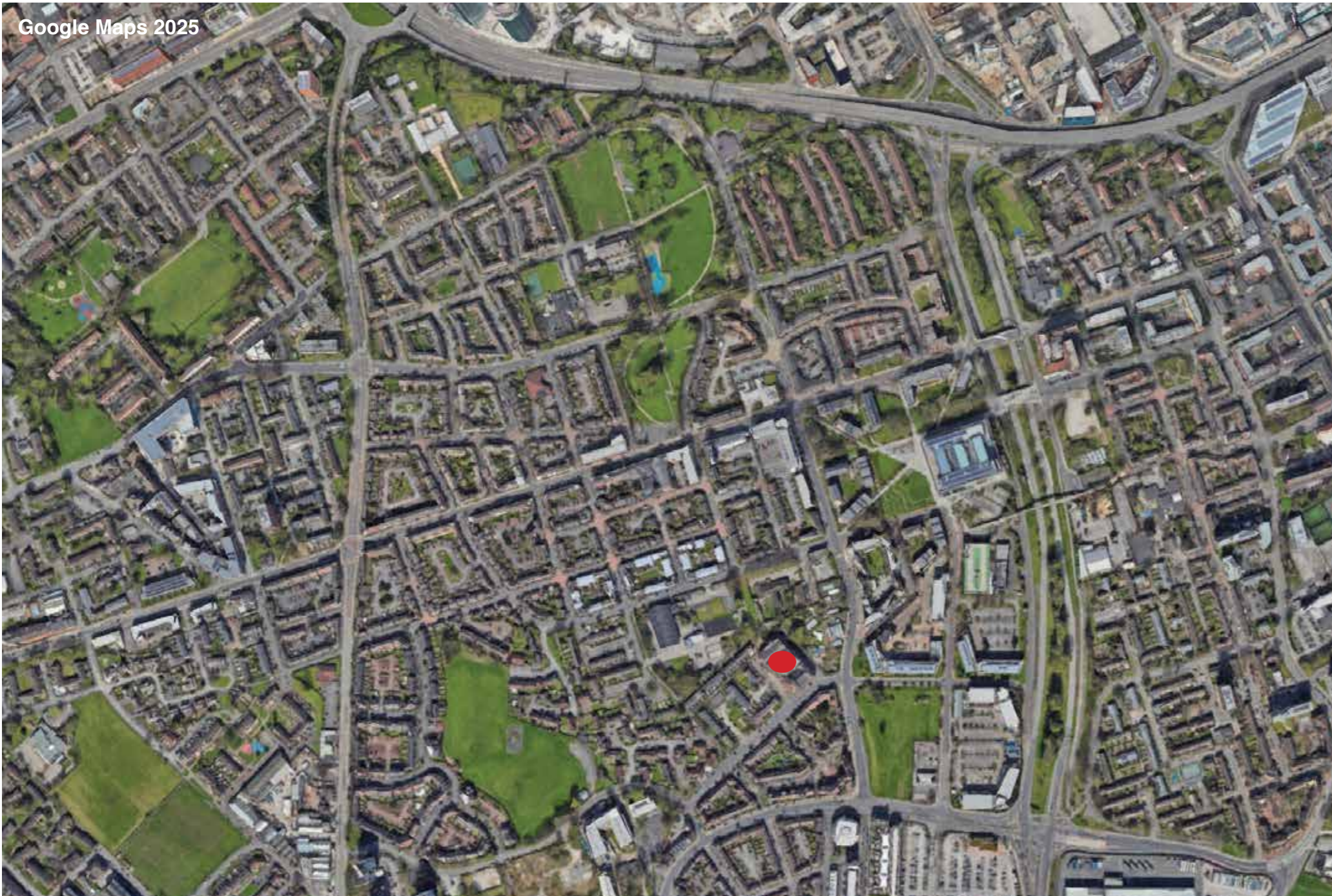
It is possible that this document could form the stimulus and basis of an Area Action Plan (AAP) or Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that would enable the Local Planning Authority to give certainty and confidence to land and building owners in their efforts to invest and regenerate this part of Hulme and it is in this spirit that this document is presented. The document should be read in conjunction with previous work by Jenny Wetton Conservation and Purcell (See below).

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this assessment exercise has been based on the references to significance in the National Planning Policy Framework (as revised 2024), as informed by two non statutory Historic England documents namely; Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment (2015) and Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (rev 2019). It has also had due regard to best practice Urban Design guidance.

The exercise was carried out by Andrew Graham BA(hons) MAued IHBC and Mr Phillip Ward and in order to fully appreciate the site and locality a thorough site visit was undertaken in May 2025. Other research and map regression were also undertaken in order to gain a greater understanding of significance of the area with regards this proposal.

It must be noted that internal access to the Hippodrome itself has not been possible prior to undertaking this work. As such information with regards the interior of this building has been on the basis of previous inspections created. However the site, area and the adjoining Playhouse were visited and a thorough understanding of context was obtained.



## POLICY AND GUIDANCE FRAMEWORK

This Assessment is created in reference to relevant UK national policy and guidance. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that Local Planning Authorities should have “special regard” for the “architectural or historic interest” of a Designated Asset when considering whether to grant permission for development (Planning Act 1990, 91-92). The Hulme Hippodrome is a Grade II Listed Building and is therefore of national importance. As such Section 66 is engaged.

## NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The statutory duties within the Act are reflected in The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that ‘Great Weight’ should be given to the heritage assets’ conservation and also illustrates the positive contribution that heritage assets can make to the creation of sustainable and economically viable communities.

The NPPF (as revised on 12 December 2024) therefore provides guidance on the management of the historic environment as well as advancing the case for good placemaking.

Paragraph 207 of the NPPF requires an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal, including and contribution made by their setting to this significance. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

This assessment is not concerned with particular proposals ready for consent but it does provide a high level assessment of a likely approach were consent to be sought. The NPPF therefore provides a useful reminder of the approach through national policy guidance with regards any proposals for future development.

## CONSERVATION AREA

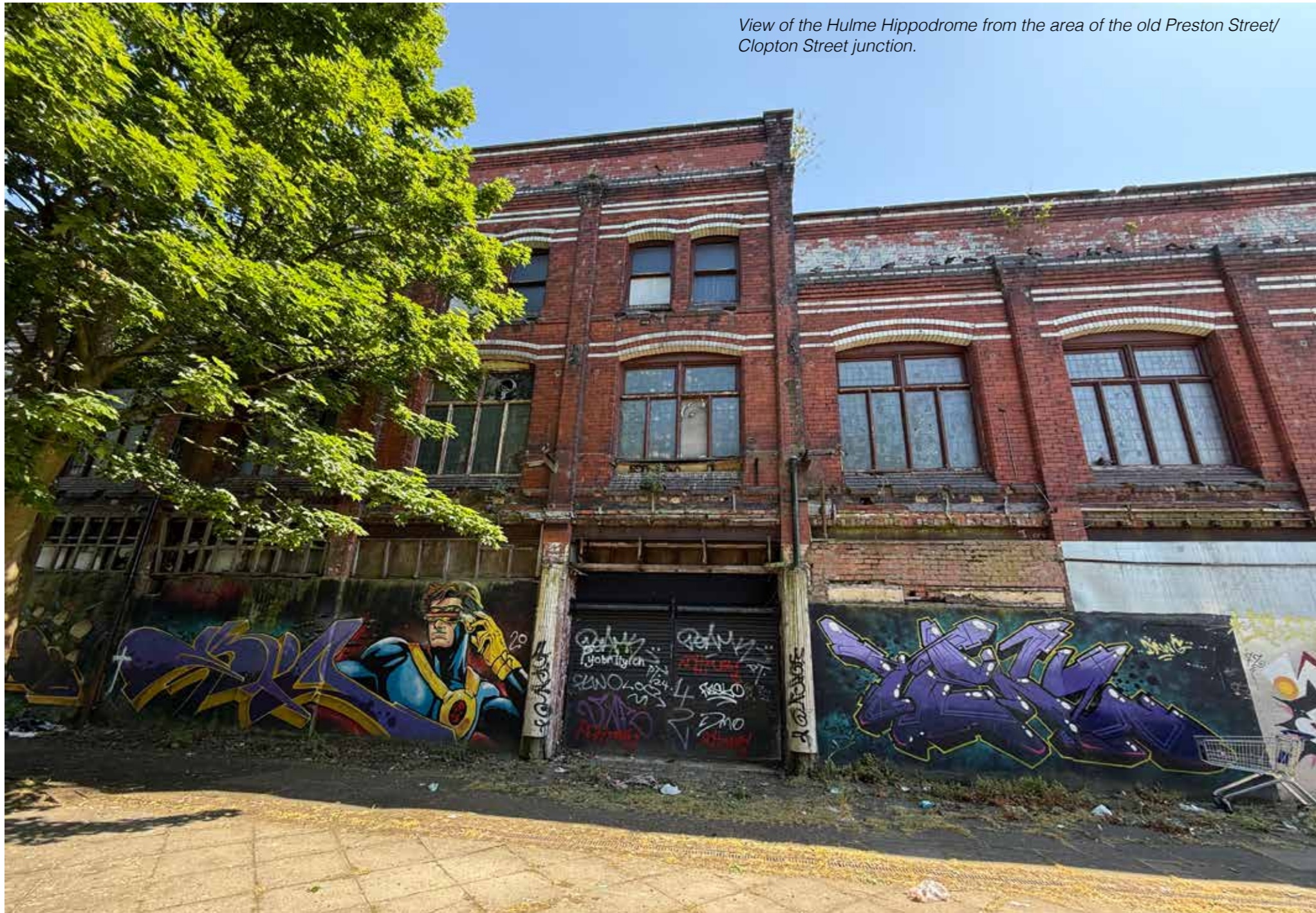
The site is not located within a Conservation Area.

## LISTED BUILDINGS

The Hulme Hippodrome is a Grade II Listed Building and it sits alongside its sister theatre, the Grade II Listed Playhouse that were constructed only a year apart in 1901 and 1902 respectively. Both buildings were added to the National Heritage List in 1977. The List descriptions were revised in 2013 and the official List Descriptions can be found at the end of this document.

**The Hulme Hippodrome is considered a Theatre at Risk by Theatres Trust.** Theatres Trust is increasingly concerned by the condition of the adjoining Playhouse which, being adjoined to the Hippodrome, will always be impacted by the condition of it.

View of the Hulme Hippodrome from the area of the old Preston Street/  
Clopton Street junction.



View from the south towards Wilberforce Close.



View of The Playhouse from Chichester Road



View of the side elevation on Warwick Street.



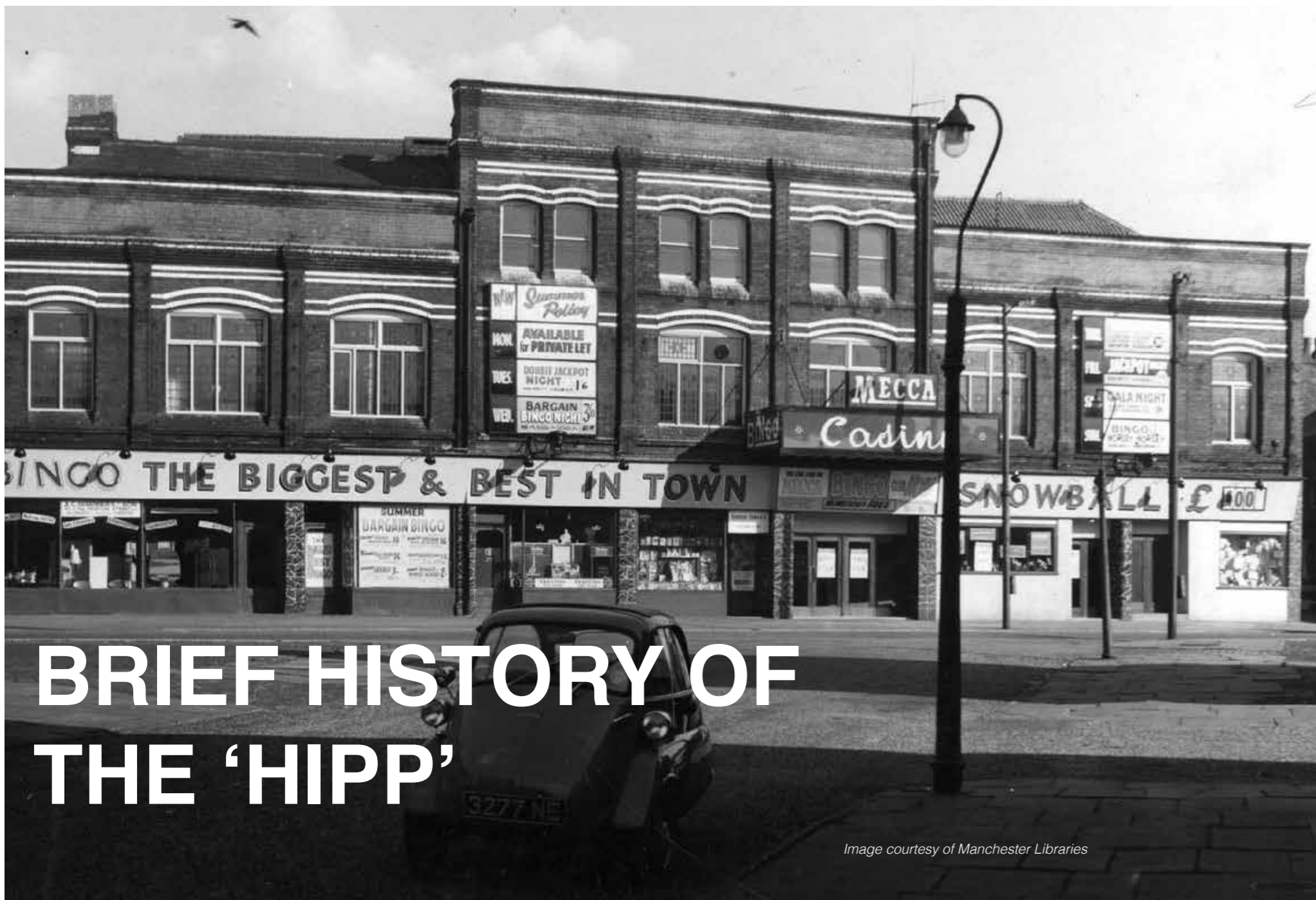


Image courtesy of Manchester Libraries

## HULME HIPPODROME

The following is indebted to Jenny Wetton in her report *'Hulme Hippodrome, Manchester: Assessment of Significance, March 2012'* that was commissioned as a review of the original Grade II listing grade and the subsequent English Heritage advice report of November 2013 recommending that the grading should not be upgraded to II\*. As such the summary below should be read in conjunction with this work and the revised and enhanced List Description is copied in Appendix A below.

### Summary of Significance

The Hulme Hippodrome was a venue for live performances from its opening in 1901 until the 1960's and was one of the largest theatres in the Manchester area at the time of its opening. It shares a party wall with the neighbouring Playhouse and together they are one of the few 'twin' theatres whereby stages were positioned at opposite sides but each theatre was linked. This was partially to economise on servicing and to enable the fluid dispersal of large crowds before and after a performance.

The theatre was designed for a working and middle-class audience not accustomed to city-centre luxury and its ornate auditorium presented a strong contrast with the plain exterior. The highly unusual design of the auditorium survives and the rare and high quality Rococo decorative plasterwork in the auditorium and the main staircase is largely in its original condition.

The Hippodrome is associated with many performers who were later to become top names in film and television, such as Stan Laurel, Charlie Chaplin, Flanagan and Allen, Frankie Vaughan, Bruce Forsyth and Morecambe and Wise to name a few. Recent research has revealed the importance of the Hippodrome to the development of Northern Variety with its distinctive working-class humour when it was used from 1950 to 1955 as a radio studio on Sundays which resulted in the purchase of the Playhouse by the BBC as a full time TV and radio studio.

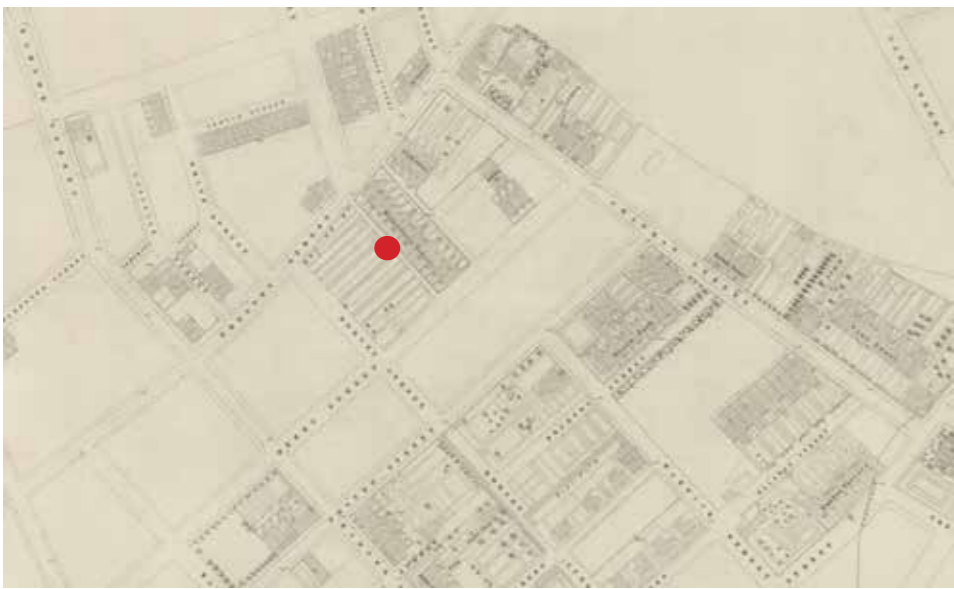
During its time as a bingo hall from the 1960's to the 1970's, the theatre acted as an important focus for people removed from their community during the major redevelopment of Hulme.

The redevelopment of the area has eroded the original setting of the theatre where it would have been something of a landmark, its main frontage onto what was a main thoroughfare providing a grand entrance into a place of escape and enlightenment for the local people. This mass demolition not only broke up a tight knit community but it also disenfranchised the Hippodrome and Playhouse from their core audiences and communities. This fragmentation has only recently begun to be re-stitched through later regeneration initiatives that sought to develop with an emphasis upon place once again. Unfortunately, the immediate vicinity of the Hippodrome has been largely neglected through these endeavours. There is an opportunity therefore to re-establish the prominence of the theatre which is explored later in this document.

Further to the above, the significance of the listed building is largely multifarious, stemming from more intangible heritage values such as its historical associations with the range of 20th century entertainers and performers and its social value to the community as much as its tangible values represented by its physical form, materials and the contribution of the building to the remaining sense of place associated with 'old Hulme'.

It is arguable that the more intangible associative and social values are somewhat down played in the official list description compared to the more tangible historical and aesthetic values. It is therefore important to note that the Hippodrome was used by the BBC for radio and TV broadcasts for much of its modern existence.

Between 1950-55, the Hippodrome was rented on Sundays to radio programmes which invited live performances to a national audience during the peak of Northern Variety with its distinctive working-class humour such as Variety Fanfare. Twenty different titles were made, including Morecambe and Wise's first programme series of their own.

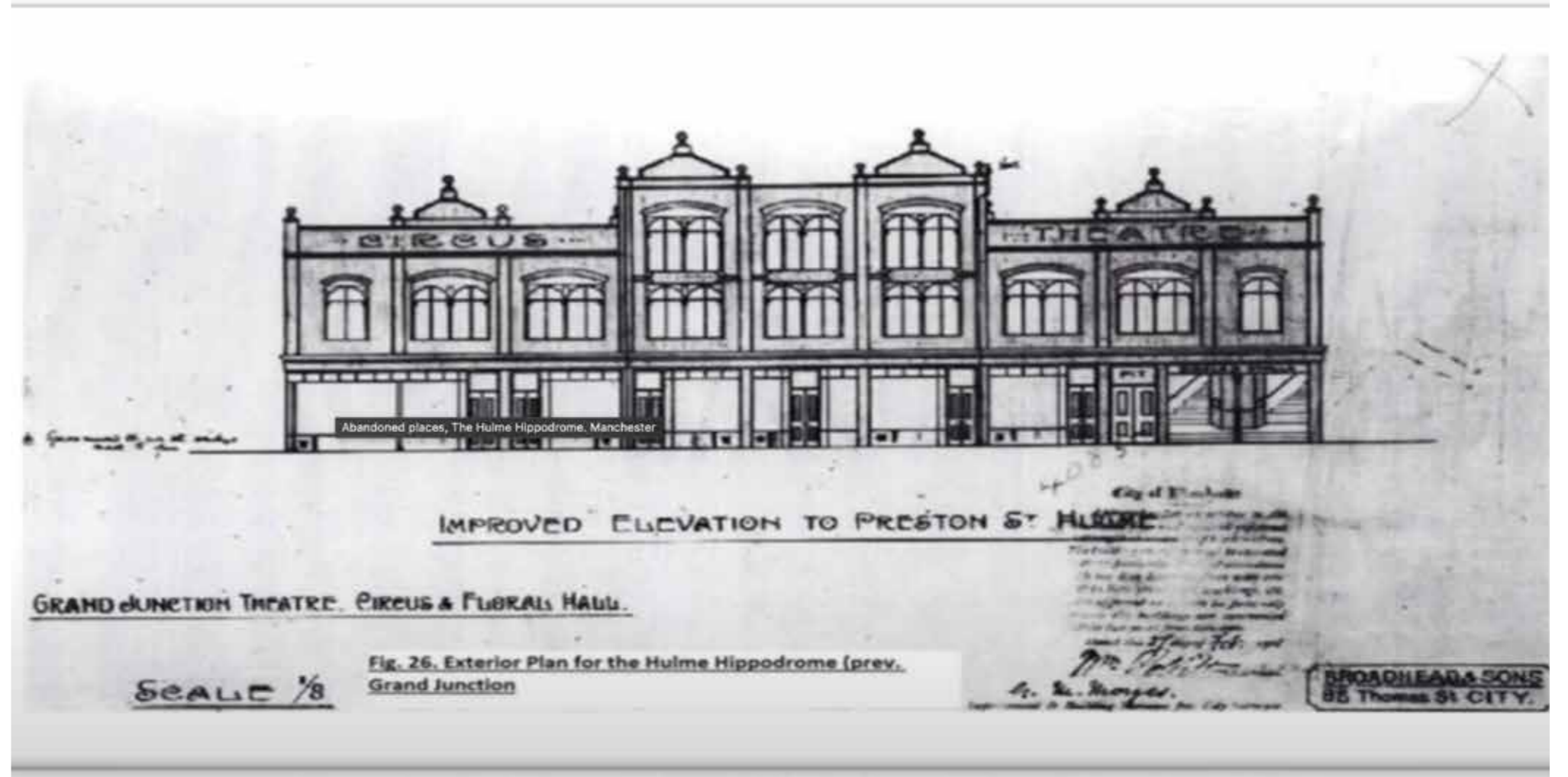


Historic maps of Hulme from 1845 (top) and 1848 (lower left) showing the lay out of the Victorian expansion of the area in a grid iron and regular layout. The site of the Hippodrome was around the location of the terrace of 13 houses Wilberforce Terrace which were demolished to make way for the Hippodrome 50 years later. The map right is the 1893 map of the area showing the rapid urbanisation and the encroachment of further terrace houses to the south of Wilberforce Terrace. These houses must have been higher status as they are the only ones with garden space around them.

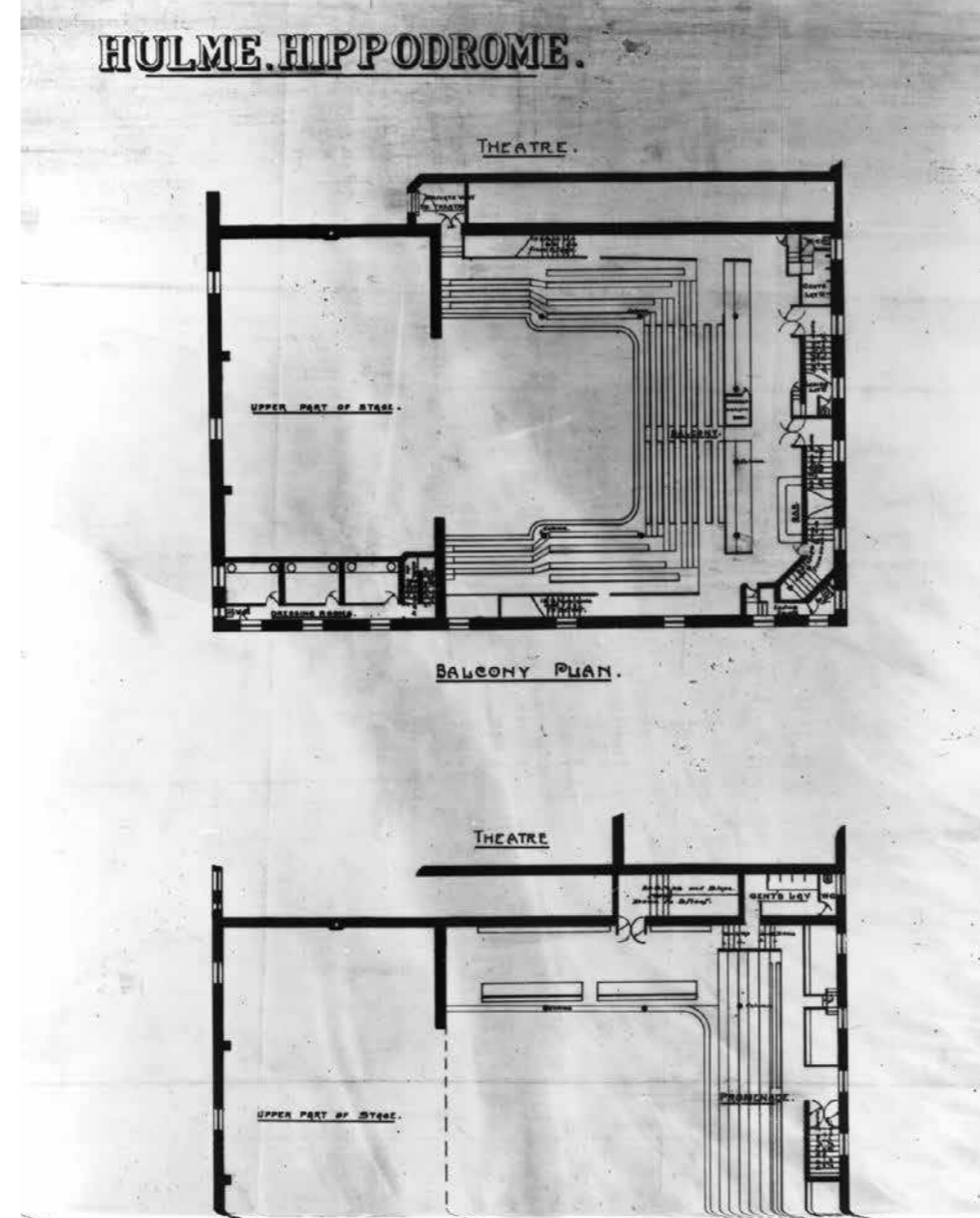
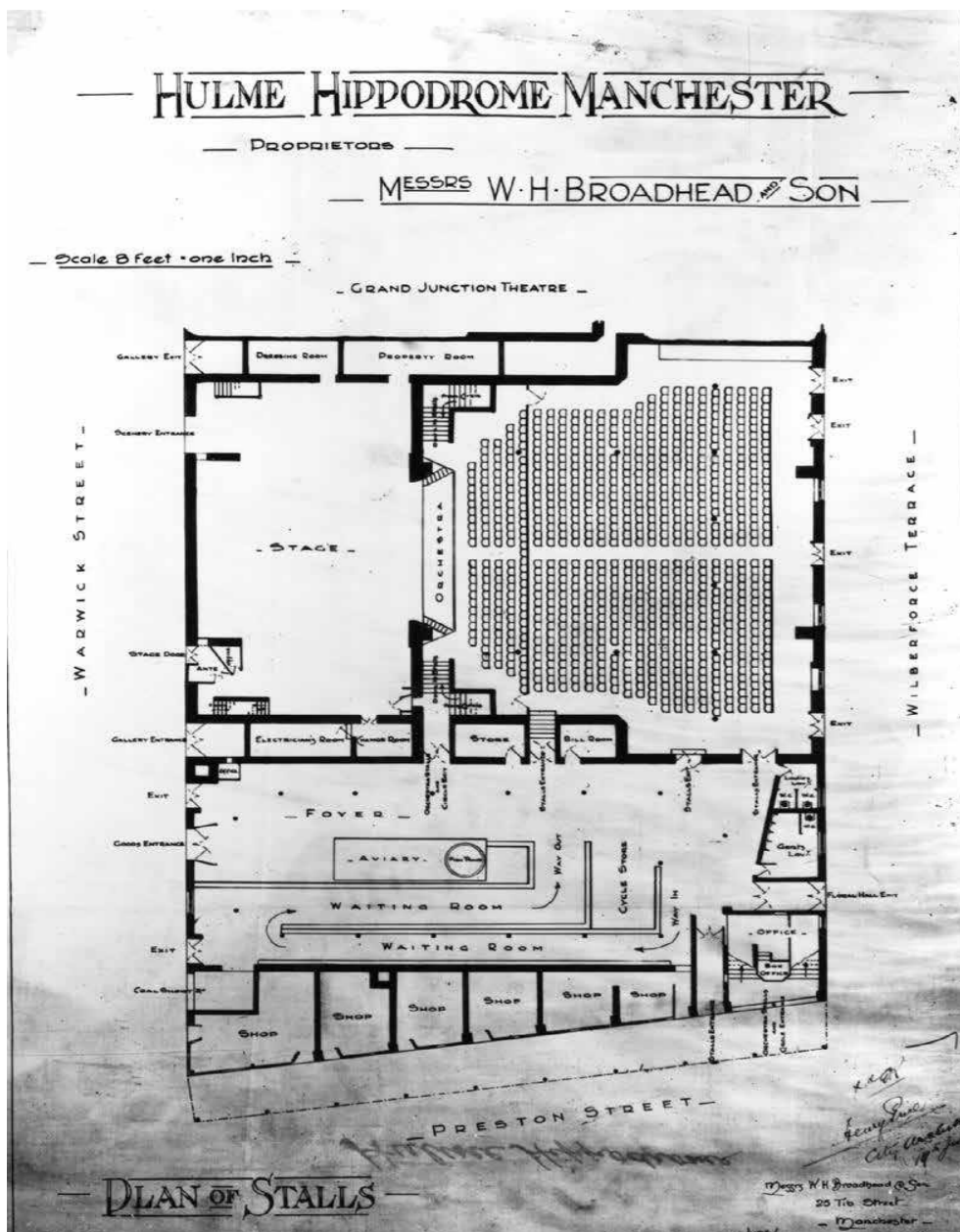
1915 Ordnance Survey Plan, published 1922.



Images of Hulme Hippodrome within its historic context. (Permissions pending)



Original Plans of the Hippodrome as it fronted onto Preston Street. (Image courtesy of Manchester Libraries)



Original Plans of the Hippodrome showing its original layout. (Image courtesy of Manchester Libraries)





*View on the corner of Warwick Street and Chichester Road showing the BBC sign above the original entrance to the Playhouse. (Image courtesy of Manchester Libraries)*



*Similar view 2025.*



*View on the corner of  
Wilberforce Close and  
Chichester Road. (Image  
courtesy of Manchester  
Libraries)*



*Same view 2025*



*View on the main elevation of the Hippodrome facing the junction of Clopton Street and Preston Street before mass demolition in the 1960's. (Image courtesy of Manchester Libraries)*



# SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

## SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

In terms of assigning and assessing significance of the theatres, it must be noted that this report can only provide an initial high-level overview of the significance of the Listed Buildings as access to the Hippodrome itself has not been possible. As such the following assessment has been largely based on external inspection, internal visits to the Playhouse along with photographic evidence from sources including the Jenny Wetton report.

In assessing significance the plans below represent not just the current situation but also the overall significance of the space with regards the potential of features to remain. For instance in the Floral Hall foliated columns may still survive beneath later encasement and as such could be restored. As such the sensitivity of the space is high but features within may be lower. More assessment would be needed were firm proposals to come forward and we are content for this plan to represent a guide to be modified and elaborated as appropriate in the future.

Taking all of this into account however, the significance of the Hippodrome can be summarised using Historic England's heritage values in Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance April 2008 as follows:

**Evidential value:** *the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.*

The level of preservation within the Hippodrome is high and, despite later alteration and damage occurring, the principal space of the main auditorium remains largely unaltered. It is a good example of a large provincial theatre illustrative of the burgeoning demand for music hall and theatrical entertainment in the late 19th/early 20th centuries. Although both the Hippodrome building and the Playhouse are of relatively standard construction there is evidential value in the survival of seating and other features within both. These represent potentially rare survivals of furnishings of the time. Both auditoriums also incorporate

straight rows of seats to the balconies; an atypical arrangement in theatres at this time but characteristic of the Broadhead circuit. Also of interest is the relationship between the Hippodrome and the Playhouse and the orientation, access and egress of each building that were often required to function simultaneously as twin theatres. This is manifested also in the operation of the former bar areas at the Circle level that seemingly served both theatres on a staggered basis. Although the evidential value is less than some such theatres, it is nevertheless considered to be **Medium/High**.

**Historical value:** *the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present - it tends to be illustrative or associative.*

The building was speculatively constructed for the Broadhead circuit, one of the largest independently-managed theatre circuits in the country and hosted well-known early to mid 20th century performers (late 19th century up to around 1930), many of whom have cited their specific memories of the building itself. The presence of the BBC and its long use of the building adds considerably to this value.

The building, together with the Playhouse represent a tangible reminder of the history of Hulme and, despite losing much of their respective contexts, the sense of place and hints to the historic social and physical connections is manifested in the buildings themselves.

As such the historical value is **High**.

**Aesthetic value:** *the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.*

In contrast to the exterior of the theatre, which has a rather unprepossessing almost factory-like appearance, the main auditorium is a richly detailed and flamboyant space decorated with ornate painted and gilded rococo plasterwork. These increase the aesthetic value of the building to being **Medium** overall.

**Communal value:** *the meanings of a place for the people who relate to*

*it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.*

The Hippodrome was used as a repertory theatre between 1945 and 1949 and has acted as a focus for a local community that was subsequently torn away from its roots during the post-war re-development of Hulme. Before its closure, the theatre had provided a stage for amateur dramatic societies including the South Manchester Operatic and Dramatic Society and Manchester and District Drama Federation and its value is **High**.

## SIGNIFICANCE VALUES

All of the building is equally listed but not all parts of the building have the same significance. Applying a simple high, medium and low rating for those parts of the building which contribute to the significance of the listed building and a neutral and negative rating for those parts which do not contribute or detract from that significance. A corresponding capacity for change can be mapped, expressed numerically with 0 being a part of the building which has least capacity for change and 3 being those parts with the most capacity to change. The scoring takes into account the significance of that element of the building and the potential to reverse negative changes and restore pre-existing features.

These classifications are based on the broad-based findings of Jenny Wetton from 2012, the subsequent Historic England response and revised list description as well as our own most recent assessment of external spaces. A more up to date and fine-grained building survey should be carried out once access is gained to the building.

Mapping the significance of different parts of the building and capacity for change will help guide future interventions into the building to bring it into a sustainable beneficial use. Changes to parts of the building which have little significance could still be considered to be harmful by the local planning authority but could be justified provided the public benefits outweighs the harm.

Setting can contribute to significance but has not been considered in

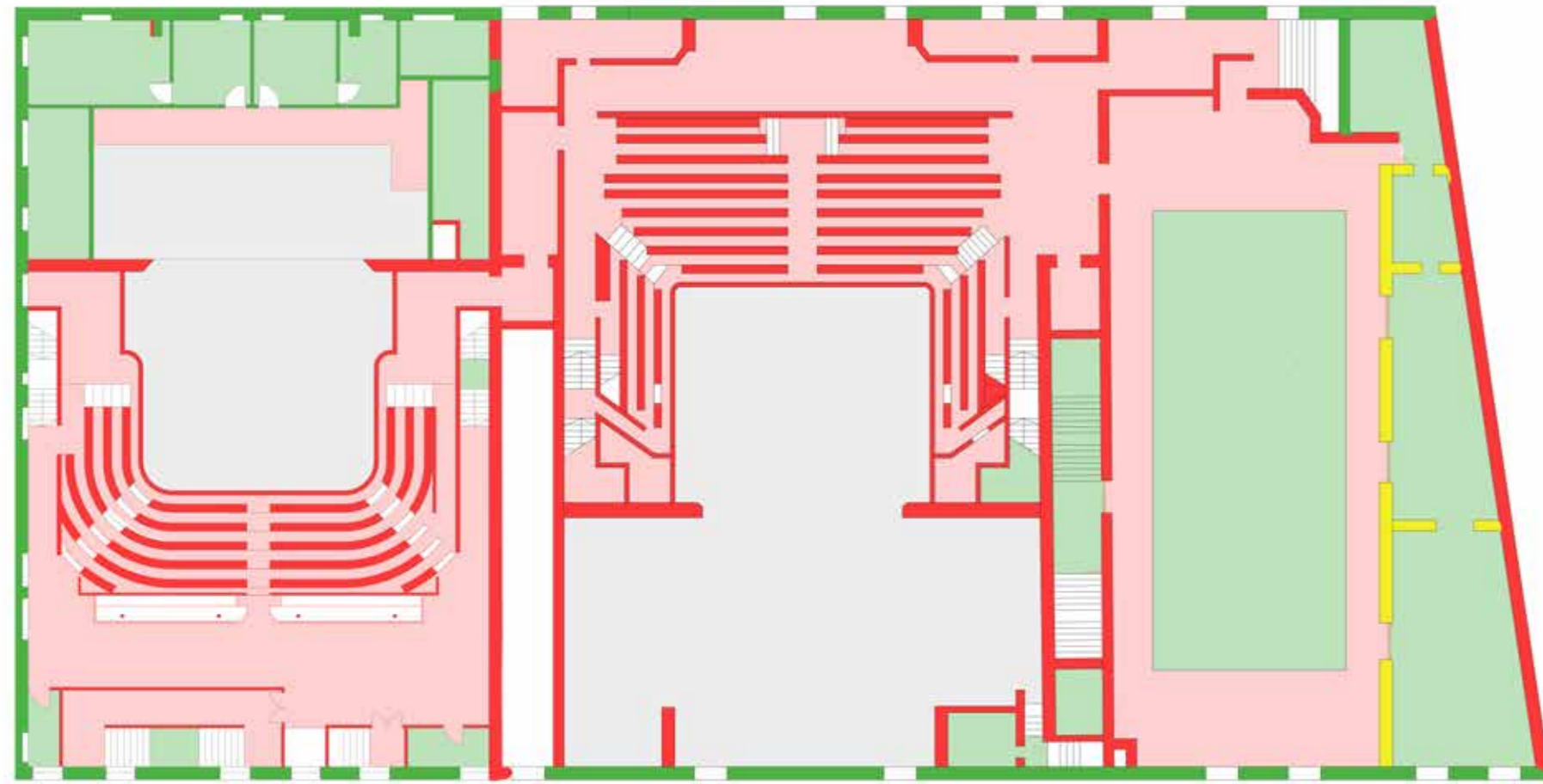
previous studies. Setting is simply defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as *"The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced"*. It goes on to say *"Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral"*. The theatre was originally surrounded by high density terraced housing, emphasising the four-square form of the theatre and proving a strong metaphor for its ties to the surrounding community. This housing was demolished from the late 1950's onwards and the Hippodrome became something of a stranded object with a poor relationship to its surroundings. Regeneration of the area in the late 1990's has not addressed the setting of the theatre except for the south side of Chichester Street which has reinstated the building line of the 19th century terraced housing.

Setting is often considered in terms of views and the principal elevation of the Hippodrome once terminated the long, straight Clopton Street at its southern extent at its junction with Preston Street, making the theatre a landmark in the intensely urban townscape of Hulme. Unfortunately, the southern end of Clopton Street was downgraded to a fairly poorly defined pedestrian walk in the late 20th century and the long vista from the north, that was previously framed by surrounding buildings, was all but lost.

Preston Street was also erased in the 1970's Radburn layout housing redevelopment around the theatre and a meagre square was provided in front of the principal elevation which has been a focus for anti-social activity. What was once a thriving street complete with trams and the principal frontage of the Hippodrome itself is now a shadow of its former self.

Element	Significance	Comments	Capacity for Change
<b>Exterior</b>			
North East Elevation	Medium/High	In the Floral Hall section of the building fronting the former Preston Street, two of the original shop units have been altered to create larger units and there has been a loss of canopies and the addition of later tile cladding to one of The Playhouse's entrances. Nevertheless this elevation still has high significance and high decorative value albeit with a higher capacity for change through creative restoration.	1
South West and South East Elevations	Low	Both elevations have incurred alterations to secondary entrances, as well as blocked-up and later inserted openings; further compromising the already modest exteriors and the building's architectural integrity.	2
<b>Interior</b>			
Main Auditorium, including stage and seating	High	The original interior plan-form and internal structure of the theatre are largely intact. The stage survives, its width and depth providing evidence of the very good sightlines afforded to the auditorium. Doorways on north-east and south-west walls of the auditorium have been covered over, a new exit door and some partitioning inserted on the stage. The seating on the ground floor and the grid-iron have also been removed. If there was bench seating in the gallery, this has also been removed. An entrance on the south-west side has been sealed and converted into a powder room, alterations to expand the toilets, a partition inserted to create a corridor with stage behind and a bar inserted at the north-east end. The original detailed and ornate plasterwork of the auditorium and the main stairs, including the elaborate proscenium as well as fixtures and fittings such as exit signs is largely intact. Although there has been re-decoration on several occasions, resulting in changes to the colour scheme and the fitting of flock wallpaper in the auditorium, this has not reduced the high significance of these areas. The staircase and auditorium were clearly designed to impress and may have been intended to enhance the feeling of escaping ordinary life which has been confirmed by oral history recordings.	1
Floral Hall and Offices	Medium	The original full height space has been subdivided to create a full-sized first floor where the original offices have been altered to create smaller rooms. It has lost its roof glazing, Japanese panoramic decoration, and balcony front. These alterations have had a negative impact on significance, but all are quite reversible.	3
Staircases and Foyers	Medium/High	The main foyers and staircases are in some part largely unrecognisable due to the later alteration that has taken place, and their legibility has been compromised. Despite this the circulation areas and balcony access do still retain significance.	2





- Lower Sensitivity  
■ Medium Sensitivity  
■ Higher Sensitivity

<small>Notes:</small> Drawings are based on survey data and may not accurately represent what is physically present. Do not scale from this drawing. All dimensions are to be verified on site before proceeding with the work. All dimensions are in millimeters unless noted otherwise. Purcell shall be notified in writing of any discrepancies.	<small>CLASS</small> Hulme Hippodrome	<small>JOB NUMBER</small> 243235	
	<small>PROJECT</small> Hulme Hippodrome	<small>TITLE</small> Existing First Floor Plan	



## OPPORTUNITIES OF HULME THEATRES

The work of the Save Hulme Hippodrome group and subsequent reporting by Purcell has highlighted a plethora of potential opportunities in order to help deliver a sustainable future for both the Hippodrome and the adjoining Playhouse. These all depend upon the stakeholders of the building being willing to bring the building back into use rather than maintaining a depreciating asset in ongoing need of temporary or urgent works.

The first milestone therefore is to enable a viable route to repair and to make the building safe. Once there the buildings have huge potential to become a true heart of a regenerated Hulme and one which could easily have a wider appeal to the wider city of Manchester and surrounding districts.

The uses would likely be implemented in phases. These could range from temporary, 'pop up' or 'meanwhile' uses in order to allow people to see this wonderful heritage survival from the heyday of the country's entertainment legacy as a first phase. Obviously this would be subject to the safe accessibility of the building but some such events could even occur outside the building initially. Such uses would begin to re-establish the strong link between the Hippodrome and the adjoining Playhouse and the wider community. There is little reason why such external events could not occur presently, ideally however subsequent phases would see the building made safe and the opening of the theatre itself. This then allows custodianship of the structure as well as much needed activity within the site and around the immediate area.

There is no heritage reason why the historic shop units could not also be opened once it is safe to do so and allow activity and much needed occupancy to occur in the shorter term. Such reopening would not necessarily need to be permanent but could provide a meanwhile set of uses to encourage activity, ownership and surveillance of the spaces and the building itself.

Equally, so long as the structure is sound and the maintenance regime



is carried out and implemented, there is no reason why performances could not occur within the auditorium of the Hippodrome as soon as it is safe to do so. Such performances would not necessarily require restoration but could occur so long as the structure is safe.

Later repair and future phases of work could obviously develop from this stage and permanent occupancy could occur on a phased basis that gradually allows the building to rise from its current state.

## THE WIDER CONTEXT OPPORTUNITIES OF HULME HIPPODROME

The Hulme Hippodrome was constructed around 1901 upon a site that previously contained a row of 13 houses known as Wilberforce Terrace. These somewhat higher status through terraces with small front gardens and yards to the rear also appear to have had a portion of linear land stretching towards the south west upon which more houses were constructed by 1890.

It was Wilberforce Terrace however that was demolished to make way for the new Grand Junction Theatre that was later to become the Hippodrome. The new building presented its front facade onto the approach of Clopton Street at its terminus with Preston Street which is where the tramlines ran as they ran around the area.

The building was rather stark in its architectural treatment on most of its facades, almost, as others have said, 'factory like' in its execution with only few concessions on the exterior to give a clue to the colour and decadence inside. The frontage of the theatre onto Preston Street must have been a fine facade at the time with shop units presenting an activity and interest to the street and terminating the approach along Clopton Street. Indeed it was likely no coincidence that this site was chosen, being as it was at the junction of these two important routes.

Later years maintained this principal facade when the building was used as a Bingo Hall but all this was to end with the mass clearance of almost the entire building stock within the vicinity of the theatre during

the 1960's. The principal tram street of Preston Street was effectively destroyed and what was once a prime route for travel was dramatically reduced to a series of constrained footpaths as they meandered their way around the new Radburn type new housing development and other modernist constructions that radically lowered the density of the area and decanted much of its population elsewhere.

The old frontage onto Preston Street subsequently had no passing trade and the halting of Clopton Street effectively gave little reason for anybody to walk towards the Theatre unless they lived in the area or were visiting the snooker hall that was housed in the converted Floral Hall. New development, where it actually happened, turned its back to the theatre or was so set back into its own plot boundary as to further dilute the previously tight grain of the streets here.

Later regeneration of Hulme under the 1990s City Challenge initiative resulted in the second mass demolition of the area and although it replaced much of the strong building frontages and density that had once been, it failed to take account of the Hippodrome and largely ignored it. This was attempted to be rectified in 2023 by the Save Hulme Hippodrome group in their production of The Junction Green Masterplan which sought to identify the Junction Green regeneration area and created a loose plan of public realm improvements.

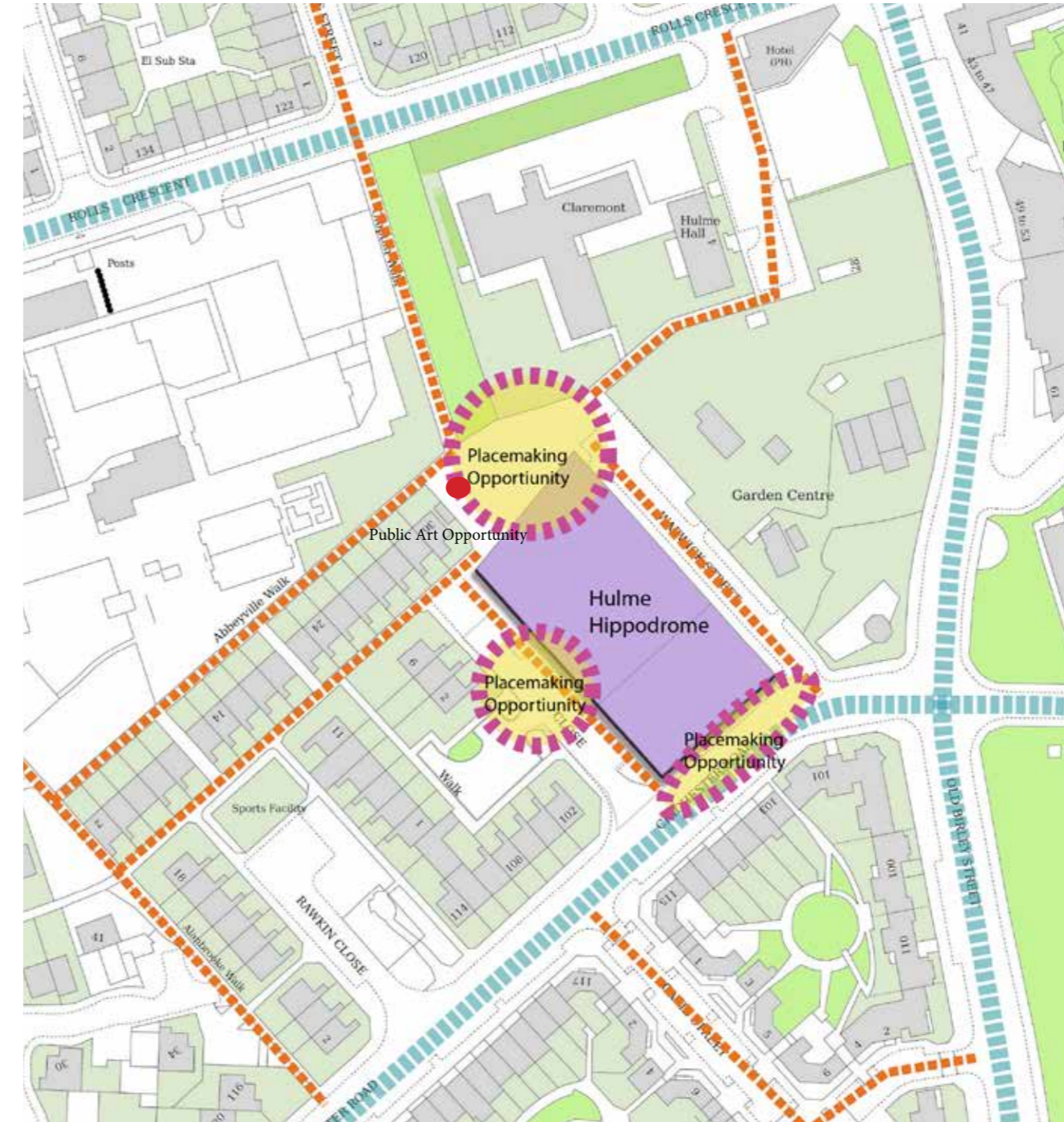
As such the need to regenerate the rest of the area around the Hippodrome and Playhouse is reliant very much upon a robust placemaking concept so as to stimulate discussion and communicate the potential of the area around the theatres. The Junction Green initiative was a community led project and was very good - but it was only able to suggest alterations in the existing public realm. This of course could, and should, be done, but what is fundamentally needed is a more robust phase of regeneration whereby the adjoining land uses play their role in helping rise the Hippodrome from its current state.

This is of course a long term plan, but there is huge scope for adjoining land owners to use their sites to improve not only the safety and

perception of the area, but also to ride in the wake of the Hippodrome and Playhouse as they enable these theatres to become a true cultural focal point within the area.

This, in turn, would have inevitable economic benefits through being located near to one of the areas great cultural attractions. However, the two cannot undertake this alone, the Hippodrome would greatly benefit from adjoining land owners to see the opportunities that contextual redevelopment could make, and these new uses also require the 'unique selling point' of the Hippodrome to set them apart from the plethora of new development heading in this direction from city centre Manchester.

As such the sketches and analysis below attempt to illustrate how the Hippodrome could, once again, become a focal point of this area through the redevelopment of surrounding open land or low density sites. The aim is not to prescribe but to illustrate that, if or when redevelopment happens to these sites, (and in our opinion this needs to be sooner rather than later) then the parameters around development would be the best route forward.



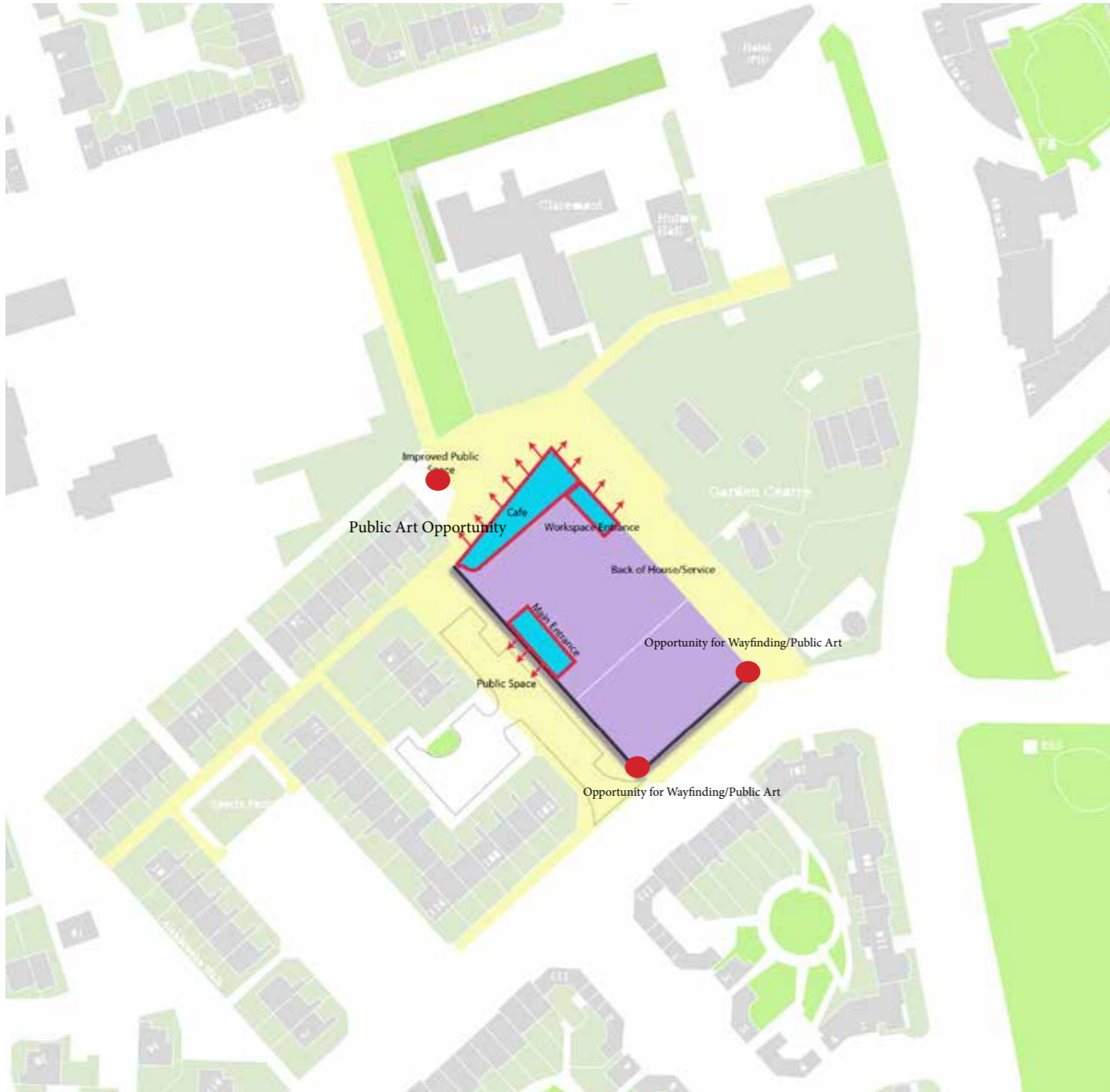
### Analysis - The Junction (Revised 2025)

*The only things that really remain from the pre 1960's layout are the subtle change in orientation of the planned 19th century grid for Hulme along with remnants of certain streets and the Hulme Hippodrome itself. The reinstatement of Stretford Road did much to reinstate an historic principal route and this has now become a focal point and main street and attraction in the area.*

*For whatever reason the designers in the 1960's however completely failed to acknowledge the principal facade that fronted Preston Street and Clopton Street, however, even this has not diminished the potential of this face of the building to provide a much needed place of orientation and strong sense of place. As such there are three potential 'placemaking opportunities' around the Hippodrome. 1) Firstly, this still remaining principal facade to the north fronting onto what is a very poorly overlooked and insecure space, but one that is still very well used by local people and also one that has great potential to be improved.*

*2) Secondly, the suggested entrance into the refurbished Hippodrome could (subject to surveys and assessment) come from Wilberforce Close and provides an opportunity to improve this place from what is currently a car park, into something much nicer for people.*

*3) Thirdly, an opportunity exists for the existing frontage to be improved through pavement widening and possibly tree planting along Chichester Road.*



### Hippodrome Functions

The Hippodrome has been assessed by previous consultants with regards its functionality and accessibility and this included 'activating' the external facades of the building in order to create a more attractive and welcoming frontage.

The scheme related opposite (devised by Purcell) showed the main entrance to the theatre being taken from Wilberforce Close which would change the street from something of a cul de sac car park to that of a more accessible and welcoming place.

To the rear, the potential to reestablish a presence onto what was Preston Street allows us to envisage the former principal frontage being reinstated complete with the restoration of the leaded glass and reinstatement of sensitive signage.

To the rear access to the work units within would be taken and this too would provide much needed activity along this rear elevation.



**IMPRESSION OF PLACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES - Wilberforce Close and Chichester Road**



**IMPRESSION OF PLACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES - Wilberforce Close**



**IMPRESSION OF PLACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES - Far end of Wilberforce Close adjacent to the old Preston Street.**

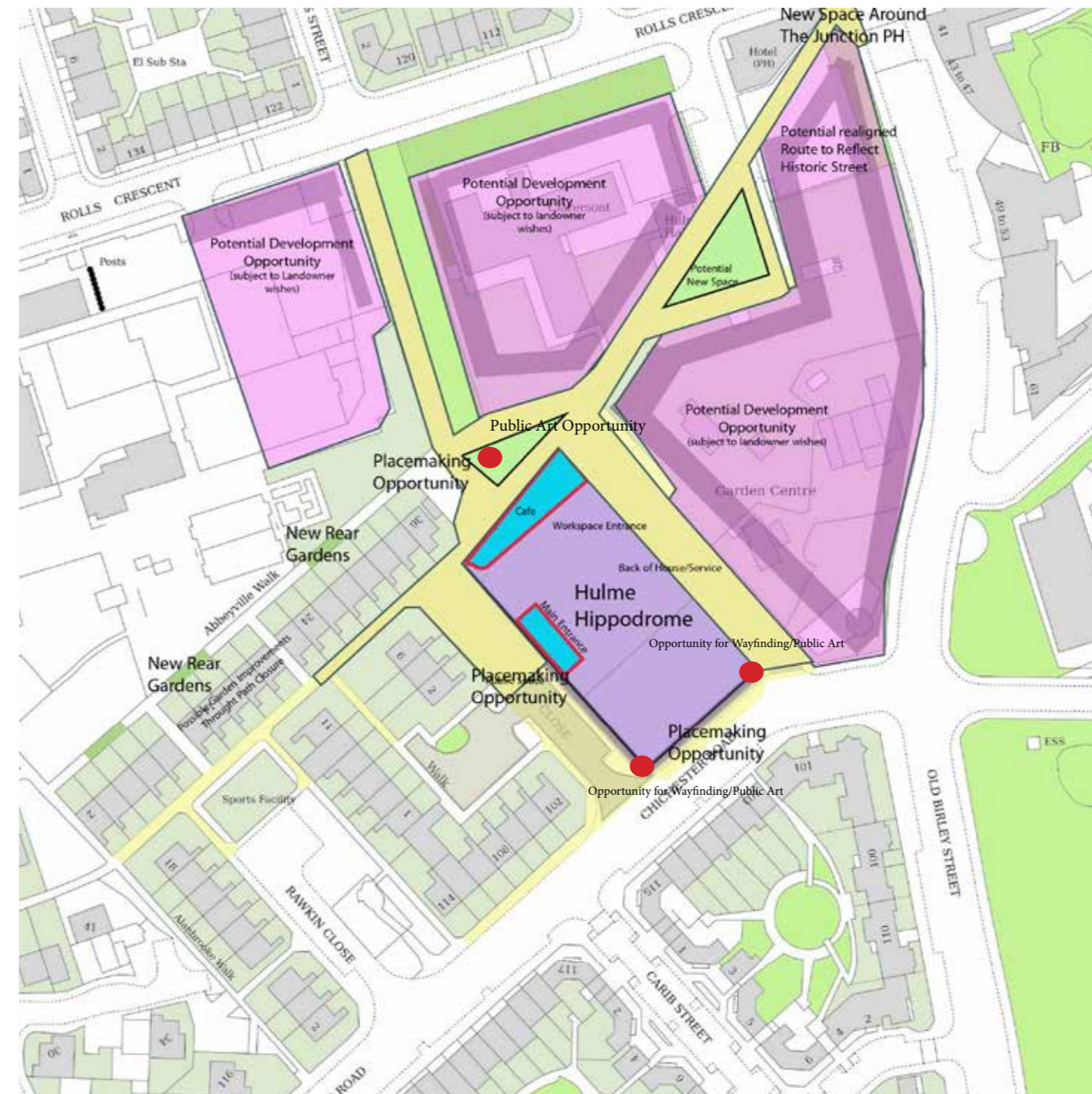


### The Junction Revisited

The Junction Green plan focussed upon placemaking opportunities for the theatre within its existing context and was a community led initiative to enable thoughts to be set out for the future of the spaces around the Hippodrome. However, accepting the likelihood or opportunity for change within neighbouring plots of land, it would be prudent to examine the ways in which these sites (were they to ever redevelop) could mutually benefit from the refurbishment of the theatre.

The major opportunity of creating a concept plan for the wider area that includes adjacent plots is that it can set out the aspirations and high level parameters for all. The analysis adjacent provides some very early concept thinking on this that, anticipating, adjoining sites develop (and this will ofcourse be the prerogative of the owners and occupiers) then great value can be give to both sites and the Hippodrome.

The Hippodrome itself ,along with other adjoining uses such as the Hulme Community Garden Centre, provides a unique selling point for local development where it can maximise the positive value that these cultural places nurture. Similarly, the Hippodrome could benefit through enhanced placemaking and footfall that could come through such development.



The concept map shown here illustrates how this could work showing where frontages and new placemaking opportunities could actually be located. Most notably this creates, or recreates, something of the old route of Preston Street. In so doing, the whole areas can once again re-link around a key axis as the historic route approached the Hippodrome from the Junction Pub. This simple realignment provides opportunities for neighbouring development sites to front onto a clear hierarchy of routes that are safe, well overlooked and have a key landmark nearby and obvious within the streetscene.

Other interventions include the potential to extend the school to face onto the old route of Clopton Street. Such an intervention could retain much planting here but also allow more access and more overlooking, which, in turn, would make this area feel safer. This view could be terminated with a piece of Public Art to create a landmark and point of orientation here.

Further to this the improvement of the public realm itself could radically improve the paving and accessibility around the Hippodrome and would also enhance the setting of the nearby developments. The Hippodrome itself could become a cultural focal point where on street activities and play are allowed to take place subject to residential amenity agreement.

**IMPRESSION OF PLACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES - Indicative sketch of possible forms of new development around the Hipp.**



# HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT



## HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT - HIPPODROME

In assessing the effect of proposals both to the Listed Building itself and the surrounding streets, spaces and adjoining sites (were they to be forthcoming) there is the potential for harm to the Listed Building. Similarly, there is (likely more considerable) potential to enhance the Hippodrome and its setting.

The overriding statutory context for this consideration is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This Act requires the decision maker to show 'special regard' to the preservation of the heritage asset and the first step in determining whether harm would be sustained would be through an understanding of the current state and setting of the building.

The Hippodrome itself has been thoroughly assessed by others previously, and some suggestions have been put forward as potential for change. There is therefore a potential approach of opening the historic units facing onto the old route of Preston Street as well as the potential for new doors to give a new access into the Hippodrome itself.

Although the plans are at a very early stage the following assessment of potential for heritage impact is related below. In the absence of access into the building however, it is impossible for us to be certain with regards fixtures of features within the building and as such any assessment is reliant upon further understanding if and when such access could be granted.

However the approach of the Save Hulme Hippodrome group is to create a space of maximum flexibility of uses which would likely include staged performances, temporary uses, markets and events whilst respecting and preserving the architectural heritage of the building.

## IMP 01: Opening of Access Points onto Wilberforce Close (External Impact)

As mentioned above, the building is quite a stark building with little articulation or aesthetic value to its exterior. As such its aesthetic appearance on the outside is low. However, the opportunities for reopening old openings or creating new entrances provide the opportunity for this building to present a much more pleasant elevational aspect onto the streets and spaces around it. We have shown the potential for large entrances onto Wilberforce Close as suggested by Purcell<sup>1</sup>. These would serve the potential new main entrance to the Hippodrome itself.

These entries would not however reflect the original entry into the building but they would present an opportunity to present an active frontage onto the surrounding street and enable the theatre to assert its presence.

The external changes would mean some disruption and removal of original fabric in the form of brick walling, internal plasterwork (if it survives) and possibly the white brick string courses to the exterior. However, subject to the deep reveals, appropriate fenestration and access doors, the proposal would present a much more amiable presence into the area and enable the activity and positive attributes of the Hippodrome to be seen and used by people in the area.

As such any impact would likely be **Minor** with the potential for considerable **Positive Enhancement** of the Listed Building and its immediate setting.

The same could be said of the adjoining Playhouse whereby new, generous access doors could be inserted or reopened into its Wilberforce Close facade thereby enhancing the presence of the theatre and the public realm on the street (for internal access see below). Alternatively

<sup>1</sup> Purcell document April 2024. This document is fairly short and generic but provides some very high level ideas and aspirations.

the potential new access into the Hippodrome could well serve both theatres thereby creating a single access point for both theatres.

### **IMP 02: Opening of Access Points onto Wilberforce Close (Internal Impact)**

In taking the above forward there is not only some potential for impact externally, but also internally, affecting the way the building functions and is understood. In assessing this impact the main alterations required to create a new access onto Wilberforce Close in this location would foreshorten the main auditorium and essentially give access directly into the rear of the stalls area in the main auditorium. Precedent images supplied in the Purcell document show the raking of stalls upwards towards the Circle level which would enable the space behind to be utilised separately to that of the main theatre space. Appendix D also shows the absence of stalls (as is currently the case) and the replacement with conference style 'round table seating'. However the experience of moving from the rear of the theatre towards the stage, emerging as one would from beneath the Circle into the higher space of the auditorium would be lost through this proposal.

As such internally there would likely be some **Minor/Moderate Harm** to the Listed Building through such an intervention were it to lose this experience of entering the main auditorium or to effect original decorative schemes within. In terms of mitigating this impact we would suggest, firstly, that there are many precedents of such circulation arrangements in other theatres, most notably the Grade II\* Listed Old Vic and York Theatre Royal buildings. As such any such intervention would be reversible and such an impact could be very well mitigated.

For instance, if the entrance vestibule could be restrained in scale or glazed so as to allow the appreciation of the stage view and entrance from beneath the Circle, then much of this impact could be mitigated. The box office could also be accommodated within the Floral Hall so as to save space and avoid unnecessary partitions beneath the Circle. As such the proposed new entrance could be maintained as suggested by

Purcell and harm avoided.

An alternative would be to introduce a new entrance into the ground floor of the Floral Hall range through the end elevation onto Wilberforce Terrace. This would then allow the Floral Hall to be utilised as it was always intended, as a circulation and service space.

Were these recommendations to be proposed then the level of harm would reduce to Negligible impact with the opportunity for **Positive Enhancement**.

### **Seating and Stalls Internal**

The proposals in the Purcell document illustrate the potential reinstatement of stall seating, perhaps raking upwards towards the Circle as has been done at other theatres. This is purely indicative. These may be, as suggested in Appendix D of the Save Hulme Hippodrome document, temporary stalls seating brought in when required thereby making the space flexible and seating removable. This would ofcourse require storage for a large number of seats, as would the proposal for conference style seating. The lack of reinstatement of stall seating to the lower level of the auditorium would represent a departure from the original theatre layout. However this arrangement did change early in the theatre's existence and has been in near constant flux since that time. No seating currently exists to the lower levels and as such harm would be **Negligible**. through the proposed solution to install temporary seating The lack of stall seating would also enable the flexibility of use to help the building provide the range of events that would be required in order to sustain it economically. As long as appropriate storage can be found within easy access of the auditorium (perhaps under the stage?) that would negate the need for unsightly storage within the space, the overall effect of the proposal would be one of **Neutral Impact** and **No Harm** to the Listed Building. Were 'raked' seating to be proposed this would have a much greater impact and would likely result in some **Medium Harm** that would need to be balanced against the benefits of the proposal.

### **Reopening of Former Shop Units onto the route of Preston Street**

The main frontage of the Hulme Hippodrome was always presented to the street that was Preston Street. As mentioned above, the mass clearance and redesign of the area in the 1960's completely disrupted any relationship between the theatre and a main thoroughfare the likes of which existed previously. 1990's regeneration of the Hulme area also neglected to focus on this element.

The public space to this area, currently grassed and with tree cover, is well used at certain times during the school term but it is otherwise in desperate need of safety and security that can only be provided by natural surveillance and activity.

The proposal is to reopen these units as active space of commercial or communal uses. Retail use has been discounted due to a conflict with local planning policy but we would suggest that there is a strong case to override this restriction to allow small scale retail as part of an Enabling Development strategy where this is in conjunction with the operation of the Theatre and where viability assessments permit.

The principle however of reopening these units would be of **Low Impact** and would provide a great **Positive Enhancement** to both the theatre and the wider area. There are historic features remaining along this elevation and an approach to consolidate and retain or restore these features would be of great benefit. Historic images provide a record of the historic shop fronts here and this should be a starting point for any rejuvenation or consolidation of historic fabric.

### **Floral Hall**

The Floral Hall seemingly represented the grand welcoming experience into the Hippodrome being a double height glazed atrium space, with balcony giving access to the upper floors and running around its edges. The Floral Hall was the principal area of congregation and furnished

with palm plants. Later changes in the 1987 installed a first floor over the atrium so as to create a snooker room. This did obtain Listed Building Consent and was considered 'removable'. Despite this it lost the cast iron balcony rails and encased several iron columns. The insertion of a first floor therefore lost the great sense of arrival into the theatre and later changes lost the glazed roof which was subsequently replaced with an iron roof later clad in asbestos sheeting.

Proposals would seek permission to retain the first floor insertion so as to create more functional space. This is perhaps regrettable and we would recommend that later phases seek to open up the floral hall space and consider the re-glazing of its roof. This was the intention of the consent application that seems to have stipulated that the inserted floor should be removable. However, in the short/medium term there is no dis-benefit in retaining the space as it currently exists as it provides space for further uses to exist.

Overall, the proposed changes here would be relatively modest although care should be taken with any subdivisions that could preclude the reopening of the Floral Hall as a functional atrium space in the future.

Overall the impact of these proposals would be **Neutral** but there is scope for great **Positive Enhancement** were the hall to be restored to its former glory.

### **Internal Decorative Finishes**

The Hippodrome is particularly notable due to its internal decorative finishes often in a Rococo style and much of the building's aesthetic significance is defined because of the survival of this rich interior, contrasting as it does with the much more stark and unrefined exterior. Other elements such as the main stair, leaded lights and acid etched glass in doors are all important elements within<sup>2</sup>. There is likely however much decorative loss through water ingress and poor maintenance over recent years which may constitute 'deliberate neglect' and further

<sup>2</sup> See Jenny Wetton Heritage Appraisal that illustrates many of these features.

assessment would be required to ascertain the level of deterioration.

The proposals as currently being formulated would aim to halt the decline of internal decorative finishes through fully securing the building from the elements. Once this is complete an assessment of survival and required maintenance would be necessary to understand the condition of the features within. The initial approach would be to secure and consolidate the decorations in order to halt any further decline in condition. The second stage would likely be to maintain the surviving fabric as is rather than undertake a full restoration.

This approach has been illustrated as being effective and helps communicate the narrative of the building and its history for future generations. It does neglect the opportunity of full restoration however this could still occur at a later date. As such the approach of managed consolidation would have **Low Positive Impact** and would have a **Neutral** heritage effect. Later phases of potential full restoration would have a more obvious **Positive Benefit**.

#### HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT - HULME PLAYHOUSE

In a similar manner to the Hippodrome indicative proposals include the possibility of opening the adjacent playhouse onto Wilberforce Close. This would require the reopening of existing arched openings but would give access into the back rooms of the back stage area (the stages of the two theatres being reversed which is of some significance to the twin theatre arrangement.)

The presence of existing openings here makes any heritage impact less than the Hippodrome and, were these openings to be revealed and a more active frontage presented it is difficult to see how this could be anything but a **Positive Enhancement**.

Internally however the alterations would affect the historic circulation of these spaces. For this assessment no visit was undertaken to these areas of the building but they are by account offices and kitchen areas

and as such likely of lower interest. These backstage areas are however not without total significance as artists such as The Beatles played here and as such the backstage spaces would present some tangible reminder of such events that would likely be important for present and future generations.

However, through managed change the alteration of circulation and entrance into the Playhouse would represent a **Positive Enhancement** of the building and would vastly improve upon the existing entrance arrangements that are far from ideal. Although the impact would potentially be **High**.

#### HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT - EXTERNAL PLACEMAKING INTERVENTIONS.

Similarly, public realm works outside both theatres would serve to enhance the setting of the buildings and, moreover, could help regenerate the shop units facing to the old Preston Street. This area is currently a rather unkempt area with little overlooking. The trees provide a framing of the Hippodrome but they also largely obscure it.

The Radburn layout of Wilberforce Close also presents a rather stark and poorly defined approach to the theatres acting as an informal car park (as Radburn layouts intended). The opportunity to widen the pavement alongside the Hippodrome and to construct a speed table type feature over the proposed entrance areas would help improve this street and change it from a simple car park (although parking would inevitably still be allowed) into an area of quality public realm. As such any public realm improvements would likely result in a **Positive Enhancement** to the buildings and their immediate setting.

The suggestions within this document of potential opportunities for development of nearby sites would also introduce some change to the immediate setting of the Listed Buildings. However, for the most part, such redevelopment would be **Positive**. It would have the potential to redefine the lost streetscene and to enable a strong sense of place to

be recreated around the Hippodrome. It would also have the benefits of offering potential benefit to the Radburn Housing nearby where some footways could be for residents use only and would enable existing houses to slightly increase their garden area whilst still maintaining security. However, were development to be over dominant or of a poor quality then it could have the opposite effect. It would be a recommendation that any future study of this area looks at a loose Design Code for such sites so as to ensure a consistent and appropriate design of layout, materials and heights.

#### EXTERNAL 'WAYFINDING'

One issue of the Hippodrome is its relative lack of visibility or attractiveness from surrounding streets. Historically the theatre had an obvious frontage facing onto Preston Street and the theatres served a tight knit community who instinctively knew where the building was. Post War clearance has resulted in a loss of visibility of the theatre and there are opportunities for 'sign posting' or 'way finding' to ensure that the building is visible and attractive. The BBC did once have vertical signs to the principal frontages and there is no reason why modern signage or even sculptural elements could not enhance the prominence of the theatres within their context.

In assessing such proposals we have no details before us but, on the whole, any impact would likely be able to represent a **Positive Benefit** to the building and would enhance the Listed Building and its stature within the townscape which is greatly needed.

*Above: The Old Vic refined restoration. Lower: The Old Vic modern entrance. Page Opposite: Top Left: Leeds Grand Theatre reactivated shop fronts, Top Right: Same theatre Howard Assembly Rooms, possible precedent for Floral Hall. Lower Left: Leeds Playhouse new entrance and way marking extension. Lower Right: Hackney Empire Waymarking extension (Permissions Pending)*



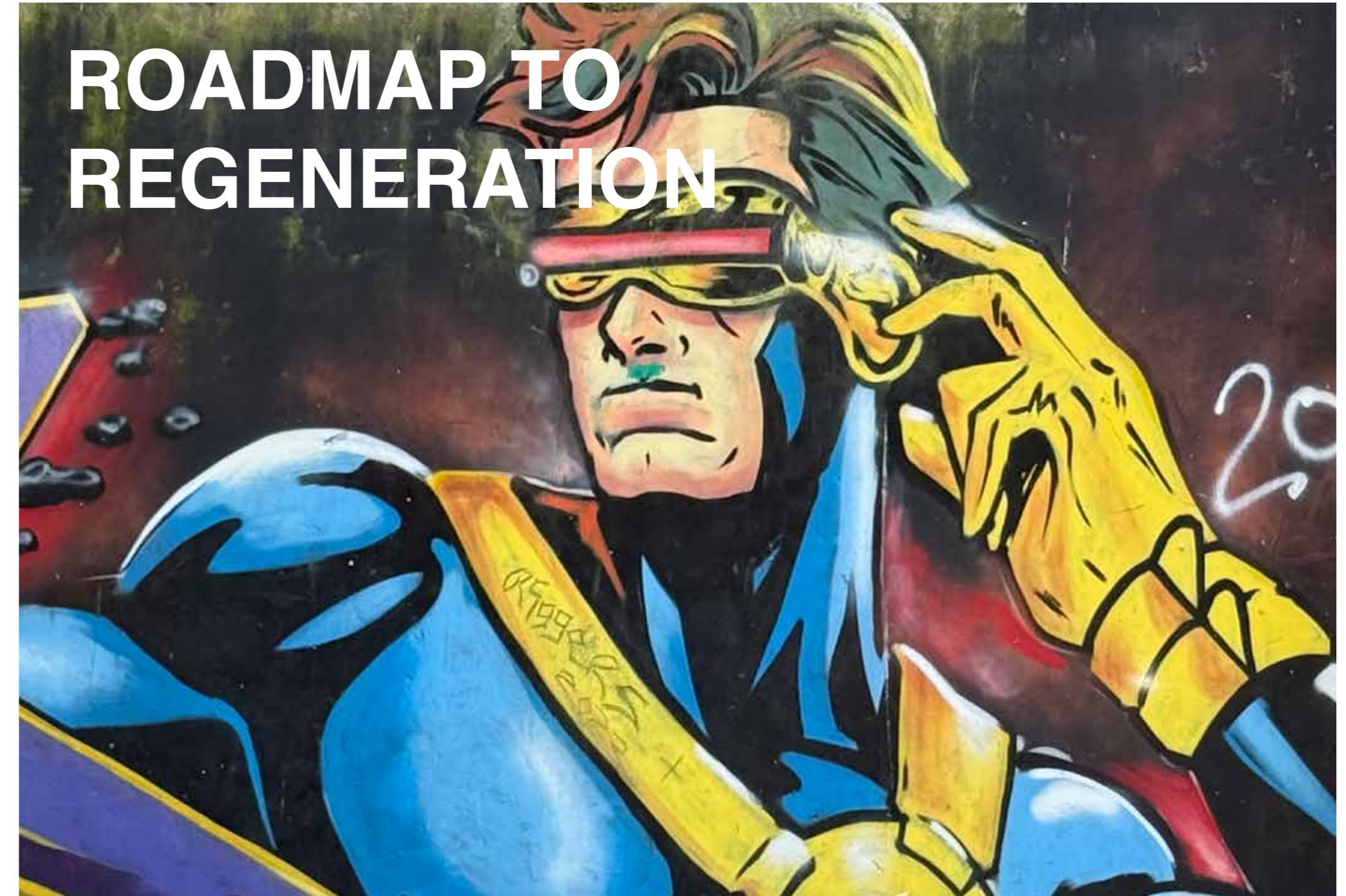


Int No.	Description and Location	Significance	Effect of proposal	Potential for Impact	Potential for Harm	Opportunity to Enhance/Mitiga	Comments Enhancement/Mitigation	Harm After Mitigation
1	Opening of Access Points onto Wilberforce Close (External Impact)	Low: The exterior of the Hippodrome and the Playhouse to this elevation is of relatively low aesthetic significance. The elevation has incurred alterations to secondary entrances, as well as blocked-up and later inserted openings; further compromising the already	Creation of new primary access points into the Hippodrome through currently unarticulated south elevation. Would involve removal of historic fabric and potential reopening of some previously bricked up apertures.	Minor	Positive Enhancement	NA	The external changes would mean some disruption and removal of original fabric in the form of brick walling, internal plasterwork (if it survives) and possibly the white brick string courses to the exterior. However, subject to the deep reveals, appropriate fenestration and access doors, the proposal	NA
2	Opening of Access Points onto Wilberforce Close (Internal Impact)	Medium/High. The intervention would occur within the main auditorium which is identified as having High Significance. Although the area to the very rear, beneath the Circle will likely be of lesser significance than other parts of the auditorium.	The intervention would insert new openings giving direct access into the main Auditorium space under the Circle area. It would also require Box Office services to be located here which would likely result in some subdivision of the space.	Minor/Moderate	Medium	YES	The opening of the rear of the theatre auditorium would alter both the circulation and aesthetic of the theatre space especially if box office services were located here. This could be mitigated with a glazed vestibule screen which would allow visibility into the auditorium from this new space. If stall seating was 'raked' upwards there would be no need for glazed screens and the impact would be Neutral subject to features and fixtures within this area.	Minor/Neutral
3	Reinstatement of Stall Seating potentially on a temporary basis.	Medium/High. The intervention would occur within the main auditorium which is identified as having High Significance.	There is currently no stall seating to the ground floor of the auditorium. As such no historic seating would be removed to allow this to occur. Temporary seating would allow the space to be fully multifunctional.	Low	Low Negligible.	NA	Subject to storage for seating.	NA
4	Installation of permanent Raked Stall Seating	Medium/High. The intervention would occur within the main auditorium which is identified as having High Significance.	Raked seating would install rows of sloping seats that would run from the floor level of the auditorium towards the Circle level.	Moderate/High	Medium	NA	Depends if the raked seating could be removable although storage would then become a major issue.	Medium

5	Reopening of Shop Units onto former Preston Street elevation	Medium/High	Former shop units reopened and facades restored or erosion of fabric halted and managed.	Low	Major Positive Enhancement	NA	The reopening of the units fronting onto this space will be overwhelmingly positive and will not only benefit the building greatly but would also provide much needed natural surveillance upon the spaces to the rear of the Hippodrome. Although retail is being restricted on Policy grounds we see the benefit of maintaining all options to allow flexibility of use here.	Major Positive Enhancement
6	Reuse of the Floral Hall as offices	Medium	The proposal intends to reuse the Floral Hall but to maintain the inserted later floor.	Low	Low	YES	The Floral Hall was once the main area of orientation and welcome into the Hippodrome. It would have been a place of quality and high aesthetic significance. The later insertion and removal of the balcony railings have likely eroded the qualities of this space and a great positive enhancement could be achieved through removing the later floor level in the medium/long term.	Major Positive Enhancement
7	Maintenance of Internal Decorative Features	High	The proposal intends to take a low impact intervention to decorative finishes whereby decoration will be stabilised but remain in its current (likely damaged) condition.	Low	Low	YES	This approach has been illustrated as being effective and helps communicate the narrative of the building and its history for future generations. It does neglect the opportunity of full restoration however this could still occur at a later date. As such the approach of managed consolidation would have Low Impact and would have a Neutral heritage effect. Later phases of potential full restoration would have a more obvious Positive Benefit.	NA

8	Hulme Playhouse External Alterations	Low: The exterior of the Playhouse is of relatively low aesthetic significance.	In a similar manner to the Hippodrome indicative proposals include the possibility of opening the adjacent playhouse onto Wilberforce Close. This would require the reopening of existing arched openings but would give access into the back rooms of the back stage area (the stages of the two theatres being reversed which is of some significance to the twin theatre arrangement.)	Low	Positive Enhancement	YES	Improvements to the exterior of the Playhouse will be positive.	Positive Enhancement
9	External Public Realm Interventions	Low	Alterations and improvements to public realm and landscape so as to improve the setting and approaches to the theatres.	High	Positive Enhancement	NA	Improvements to the exterior of the Playhouse will be positive.	Positive Enhancement

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# ROADMAP TO REGENERATION

## ROADMAP FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

### List of Assets of Community Value (ACV)

Revisit the possibility of the Hippodrome/Playhouse and the Junction PH being on the register of Assets of Community Value. Although past efforts have failed there is clear and tangible public interest that would only increase through future events, either temporary or permanent, with the building. This would give the Save Hulme Hippodrome group the opportunity to raise funds should the opportunity arise to purchase on the open market.

The Junction PH should also be considered a Non Designated Heritage Asset as per the NPPF due to its contribution to the social and aesthetic history of Hulme and its role in community cohesion, identity and wellbeing. The building is a therefore a positive and tangible reminder of the old Hulme that was. It is also an essential townscape component due to its de-marking of historic street patterns and sense of place due to it being one of the few buildings from the Hulme of the past that survives.

### Planning Policy

The emerging ideas around masterplanning are key to bringing the building back into sustainable cultural use - potentially securing funding by tying uplift in value of adjacent sites to capital investment to the Hippodrome and improving the functionality and visibility of the building in the wider setting and just making it look more appealing.

Confidence of investors would be strengthened if the masterplanning moves were enshrined in the development plan through a **Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** for the revised **Junction Masterplan** or informal planning guidance. This could also manifest itself in the form of a **Design Code** for the area around the Hippodrome in order to give new development certainty through the planning system and ensure

harm to the Listed Building is avoided.

### Funding

Opportunities of grant funding and loans that may be available through opening dialogue with funders and possibly Historic England. This may be helped through recognising the building in the national Heritage at Risk portfolio. Other monies for public realm improvements could also be sought through local placemaking initiatives or as a contribution from new development nearby.

### Securing Repairs

What is the appetite for further enforcement action? Is there any funding to underwrite the cost of repairs should enforcement action (Urgent Works Notice etc) be required. The repair of the building is key to delivery of any of the above. Equally the liability of the building must be realised and this must be assessed against the actual value of the building. Repairs should be enforced and, if necessary, implemented and charged back to the owners. As a last resort Compulsory Purchase should be considered if all other options to bring the building back to productive use have been exhausted.

### Possible Alterations to the Listed Building to Add Value

Subject to further structural investigation and acoustic requirements, there may be opportunity to create further accommodations within or to the roof of the Hippodrome. Historic modifications to the roof have occurred previously and the building could potentially offer an opportunity for 'parapet' level new development to cross subsidise restorations and repairs. Obviously such proposals would need careful thought and any application would need to be assessed accordingly.

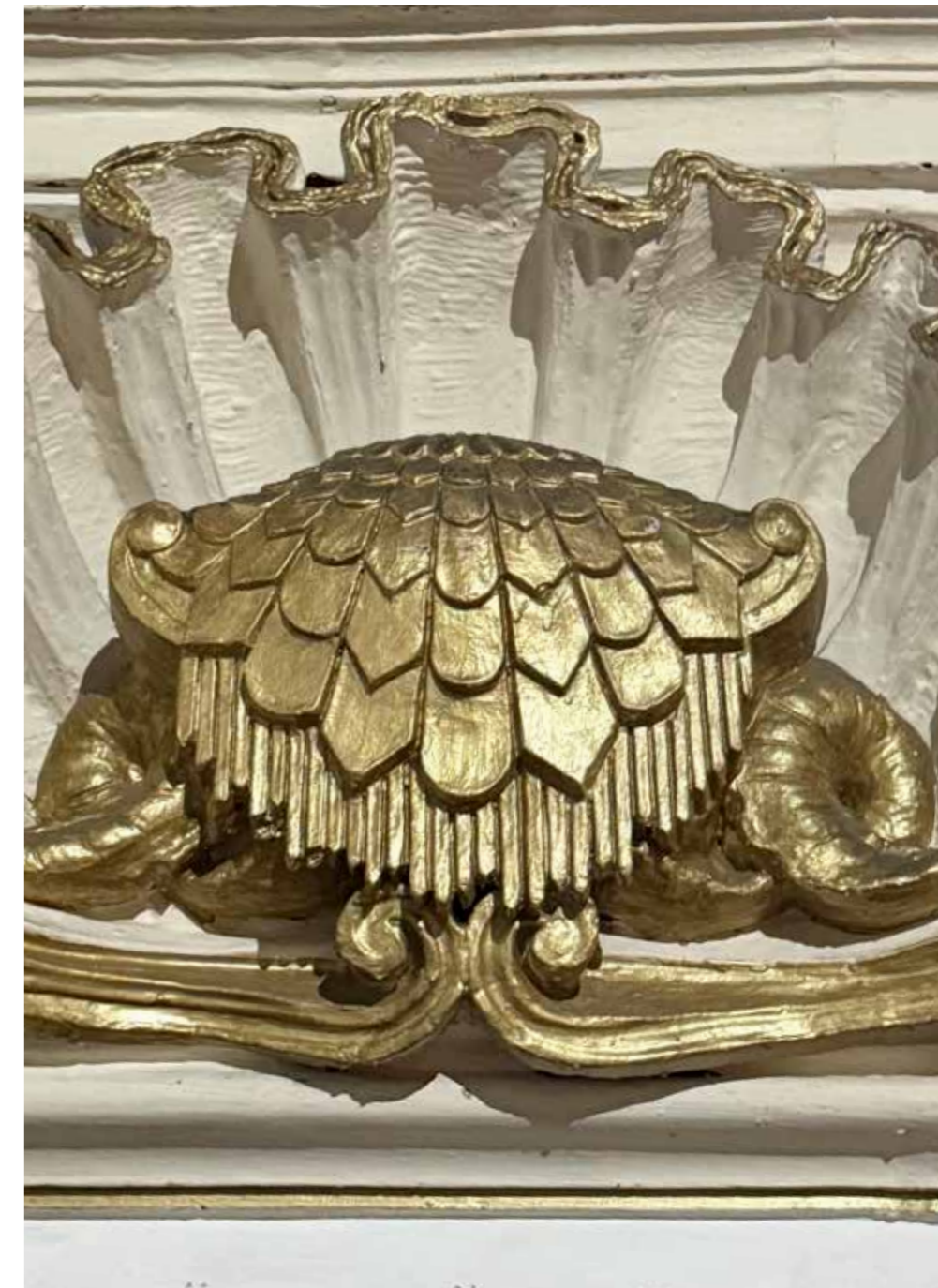
## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The high level assessment and masterplan of the buildings here should be read in conjunction with previous documents by others, most notably that of Jenny Wetton who has provided an excellent baseline heritage appraisal of the building.

The future of the building will be guided by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the opportunities for refurbishment and regeneration of the wider would protect the significance of the building and enhance its setting.

However, ownership issues need to be resolved as soon as possible to halt the degradation and enable the condition of the building to be secured. Once this is fulfilled, the building can begin to be repaired and offer access to the public once again. Through taking a low intervention approach the building's age and 'faded glory' will become a unique selling point and the building will become a unique venue that could help fund future restoration and finally, one day, bring the Hulme Hippodrome back to its rightful place.

Such a goal is in sight and the opportunities are real and tangible. This document is intended to promote discussion and give further confidence to stakeholders that the Hulme Hippodrome has a bright future and that it can have real benefits for the people of Hulme and its communities.



*Detail of Circle decoration in the Playhouse.*

**APPENDIX A**  
**OFFICIAL LIST DESCRIPTIONS**

**OFFICIAL LIST ENTRY**

Hulme Hippodrome

**Heritage Category:**  
Listed Building

**Grade:**  
II

**List Entry Number:**  
1283070

**Date first listed:**  
08-Jun-1977

**Date of most recent amendment:**  
18-Nov-2013

**List Entry Name:**  
Hulme Hippodrome

**Statutory Address 1:**

Hulme Hippodrome, Warwick Street,  
Hulme, Manchester Location

**Statutory Address:**  
Hulme Hippodrome, Warwick Street,  
Hulme, Manchester  
The building or site itself may lie within  
the boundary of more than one authority.

**District:**  
Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)

**Parish:**  
Non Civil Parish

**National Grid Reference:**  
SJ8349296456

**Summary**

Theatre, 1901, by JJ Alley. Red brick with white glazed-brick dressings, slate and corrugated-metal covered roofs. Three storeys plus basement.

Reasons for Designation  
Hulme Hippodrome, constructed in 1901 to the designs of JJ Alley, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

\* Building type: it is a good example of a large provincial theatre illustrative of the burgeoning demand for music hall and theatrical entertainment in the late-C19/early-C20;

\* Interior quality: the main auditorium is a richly detailed and flamboyant space decorated with ornate painted and gilded Rococo plasterwork;

\* Level of survival: despite later alteration occurring to the rest of the building the principal space of the main auditorium remains largely unaltered;

\* Design interest: the auditorium incorporates straight rows of seats to the balconies; an atypical arrangement in theatres at this time and a Broadhead Circuit theatre characteristic;

\* Historic interest: it was constructed for the Broadhead Circuit, one of the largest independently-managed theatre circuits in the country, and hosted numerous well-known early-mid C20 performers;

\* Group value: it has strong group value with the adjacent Grade II listed The Playhouse, Hulme (List entry 1293008, NHLE) which was also designed by JJ Alley and was constructed in 1902; the two theatres together representing an

unusual twin theatre arrangement.

**History**  
Hulme Hippodrome was constructed in 1901 to the designs of JJ Alley and was originally known as the Grand Junction Theatre and Floral Hall. The theatre was built as part of the Broadhead Circuit, which was a chain of theatres in the north-west of England founded by William Henry Broadhead; the Grand Junction Theatre was Broadhead's third theatre. The theatre, which had a seating capacity of 3000, originally specialised in melodrama and also included a floral hall incorporating Broadhead Circuit offices and a refreshment kiosk.

In 1902 JJ Alley designed the neighbouring Playhouse (originally known as the Hulme Hippodrome) as a music hall (separately listed at Grade II), which was added onto the south-east end of the Hippodrome. It has been suggested that the two theatres were originally linked by an arcade, but there is no visible evidence for this. JJ Alley also designed a number of other theatres in the Manchester area, many of which have since been demolished, but survivors include the Grade II listed Tameside Hippodrome (1904, with a 1933 Art Deco interior by Drury & Gomersall).

In 1905 the two buildings swapped names, with the Grand Junction Theatre and Floral Hall becoming the Hulme Hippodrome and the former Hulme Hippodrome becoming the Grand Junction Theatre (later the Junction Picture Theatre, and latterly known as The Playhouse). The newly titled Hulme Hippodrome also switched over to music hall entertainment at this time. Numerous stars of the early-mid C20 performed at the two theatres, including Laurel and

Hardy, Nina Simone, George Formby and Frank Randle.

Following William Henry Broadhead's death in 1931 many of the Broadhead Circuit theatres were sold off, including the Hulme Hippodrome, which was sold to Buxton Estates in 1932. In 1938 the Hulme Hippodrome was acquired by the James Brennan Circuit, which also purchased the adjoining Grand Junction Theatre in 1950; refurbishing and redecorating both theatres at this time and reducing the capacity of the Hippodrome to 2000. Inter-connection between the two theatres was blocked-up in 1955.

In 1962 the theatre was used as a bingo and casino venue. At this time one of the Preston Street shops was also converted to create a larger entrance, the former booking office window was reduced in size, and the dividing columns between the shop units were covered with cladding. By 1971 the ground floor of the building had been rendered and had also been partly encased within metal cladding (now removed). By the late-1970s the shop units had also been converted for bingo use and several of the entrances had been blocked-up. Further internal alterations were carried out in 1977 and 1981, and in 1986 the floral hall was converted into a snooker room and lounge bar, having previously been adapted for various uses, including as a store for the Broadheads' cars, as an aviary to keep waiting audiences entertained, and as a gaming machine area; the conversion resulted in the loss of the original partly-glazed roof and the promenade balcony front. The theatre was also briefly used as a nightclub,

which closed in 1986. It has latterly been in use as a church.

Details

**PLAN:** Hulme Hippodrome was originally surrounded by terraced housing, which has been swept away by later re-development. The theatre has three principal elevations fronting the former Preston Street (now a pedestrianised square), Warwick Street and Wilberforce Close. Attached to the south-east end of the building, fronting Chichester Road is the separately listed Hulme Playhouse. Internally the theatre has a U-shaped auditorium aligned north-east - south-west with a former floral hall off to the north-west side.

**EXTERIOR:** North-west elevation: this was originally the principal front elevation and fronted onto Preston Street, which has been lost to mid-C20 re-development; the elevation now fronts onto a landscaped square. The plain tripartite elevation is stepped and consists of a taller 3-storey, 3-bay central section flanked by lower 2-storey, 3-bay wings; all with a parapet hiding the roofline and pilaster strips dividing the bays. Large painted lettering on the parapet of the right wing reads 'HIPPODROME' and although remnants of painted lettering survive to the left and central parapets, they are no longer discernible. Originally there were four shops to the ground floor, but the ground floor was rendered in 1971 and the shops subsequently converted for the building's later bingo use. The original main entrance, which was located to the ground-floor right of the taller central section, has been heavily altered. However, the original fluted columns flanking the entrance, which have been

encased by later cladding, survive underneath and are partly visible. A deep flat-roofed canopy above the entrance and depicted in photographs dating to the mid-C20 has been removed. The first floor is lit by large windows containing leaded glazing and the second floor by paired sash windows; all have segmental-arched heads and most are boarded-over. The elevation incorporates white glazed-brick banding detail, which is replicated to the building's other elevations.

North-east elevation: this elevation, which fronts Warwick Street and includes the theatre's fly-tower, is mainly of 3-storeys and had billboard-style metal cladding in the mid-C20, which has since been removed. The ground floor has been rendered and incorporates a series of seven original and later inserted doorways. The first floor is lit by widely-spaced casement windows with sandstone sills and lintels, which are replicated to the second floor (most of the windows are boarded over and one of the second-floor windows has been bricked-up), and also incorporated to this side is a square chimney with white glazed-brick decoration. Above the second-floor windows is a dentilled band that continues across the facade of the adjoining Playhouse.

South-west elevation: this elevation, which originally fronted Wilberforce Terrace and now fronts Wilberforce Close, is similarly styled to that to the north-east side with a series of altered entrances to the ground floor and casement windows (some of which are boarded over) to the upper floors. Like the other two elevations the ground floor has been rendered, but at the time of the inspection, much of the

render had fallen off, exposing the original brickwork beneath.

**INTERIOR:** internally the theatre is in a state of disrepair with some missing plasterwork and damage to some ceilings, stairs and floors. The interior contains concrete, stone and timber stairs, which access the various levels and exits. Some original and early doors survive within the theatre, including doors on the main staircase with glazed upper panels bearing the name 'HIPPODROME' and 'STALLS', and leaded-glazed overlights bearing the word 'EXIT'; this staircase also incorporates a decorative gilded wrought-iron balustrade with a painted timber handrail and newel post to one short upper flight.

The u-shaped auditorium, which has two galleries (circle and balcony) and a proscenium arch in its original state, has some mid-C20 alterations, but retains elaborately decorated gilded Rococo plasterwork and panelling to the gallery fronts, doorways, walls and ceiling, including shell motifs, scroll decoration, festoons and garlands, and musical instruments. The decoration is believed to have been in cream and gold originally, but is now in a variety of vivid colours. The proscenium has a moulded architrave incorporating 'green man' imagery and is flanked by giant fluted Ionic columns, which support a decorated entablature that incorporates a frieze with masks flanked by carved consoles, and a large central cartouche flanked by putti; the original steel fireproof curtain has been removed. In front of the orchestra pit is an elaborate gilded-iron balustrade. The seating has been removed to the stalls and balcony, and that which survives to the circle is a later replacement. The au-

ditorium ceiling incorporates decorated ribs that are supported by Atlas-style figures emerging from consoles. The rest of the ceiling is panelled with central roses and panels incorporating foliage decoration and cartouches, surrounded by similarly decorated outer panels.

The circle has straight rows of seats to the central stage-facing section and side arms, whilst the balcony has straight rows to the centre, spanning between the side walls. Both galleries are supported by painted and gilded cast-iron columns with foliated capitals (some of the columns have later mosaic cladding), and similarly-styled slender columns on the balcony support the ceiling. The circle has boxes located at the stage end of each side arm, flanking the proscenium, with a further box located immediately above and accessed by a small stair. The relatively narrow first-floor circulation space behind the circle retains original decorative pelmets to the windows. The balcony has stores and a later function room in-filling the stage-end of the side arms with an original balustrade retained in front.

Located within the altered main entrance off Preston Street, and hidden by a modern suspended ceiling, is some early plasterwork decoration, including a large sun motif on the ceiling. Another former entrance on the south-west side of the building has been converted into a ladies powder room and has painted plasterwork decoration to the upper part of the walls in the form of a rope draped with curtain swags. Dressing rooms are located in the basement and on the first-floor level on the Warwick Street side of the building; those in the basement were

not inspected, but are believed to be similarly styled to the first-floor rooms, which are plain and incorporate some wall panelling. A mercury arc rectifier (possibly c1901) by Statter & Co. of London also survives within the basement. No original machinery survives within the fly-tower, but spotlights survive in a small lighting room at the rear of the balcony.

The former floral hall is located at the north-western end of the building and was originally used as a smoking lounge and was decorated with palms and plants, with a Japanese panoramic design adorning the walls, which is no longer extant. The hall was originally open to a glazed lantern roof with a first-floor balconied promenade supported by cast-iron columns and incorporating Broadhead Circuit offices off to the north-west side. The hall has since been floored over and is now used as function rooms; all but one of the columns have been encased and the adjoining former shops, which were formerly converted as part of the building's alterations for bingo use, are now office and storage space. The hall's balcony front has been removed and the first-floor offices have been converted into storage rooms and a bar lounge (a small section of the balcony front survives in a wall opening in the bar area), and a kitchen has been inserted to the north-east rear of the hall. A heavy decorated beam at the south-west end of the space is supported by a painted cast-iron column with a foliated capital. The hall's roof glazing has been removed and a suspended ceiling inserted.

## OFFICIAL LIST ENTRY

The Playhouse

**Heritage Category:**  
Listed Building

**Grade:**  
II

**List Entry Number:**  
1293008

**Date first listed:**  
08-Jun-1977

**Date of most recent amendment:**  
18-Nov-2013

**List Entry Name:**  
The Playhouse, Hulme

**Statutory Address 1:**  
The Playhouse, Chichester Road, Hulme,  
**Manchester Statutory Address:**  
The Playhouse, Chichester Road, Hulme,  
Manchester  
The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

**District:**  
Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)

**Parish:**  
Non Civil Parish

**National Grid Reference:**  
SJ8353496417

**Summary**  
Theatre, 1902, by JJ Alley. Red brick with white glazed-brick dressings, slate roofs. Three storeys plus basement

Reasons for Designation  
The Playhouse, Hulme, constructed in 1902 to the designs of JJ Alley, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

\* Building type: it is a good example of a provincial theatre illustrative of the burgeoning demand for music hall and theatrical entertainment in the late-C19/early-C20;

\* Level of survival: despite later alteration occurring to the rest of the building the principal space of the main auditorium remains largely unaltered and retains its highly decorative Baroque plasterwork and early seating in the circle;

\* Historic interest: it was constructed for the Broadhead Circuit, one of the largest independently-managed theatre circuits in the country, and it was later the location of The Beatles first BBC radio recording in March 1962.

\* Group value: it has strong group value with the adjacent Grade II listed Hulme Hippodrome (List entry 1283070, NHLE) which was also designed by JJ Alley and was constructed in 1901; the two theatres together representing an unusual twin theatre arrangement.

### History

The Playhouse was constructed in 1902 to the designs of J.J. Alley and was originally known as the Hulme Hippodrome. The theatre was built as part of the Broadhead Circuit, which was a chain of theatres in the north-west of England founded by William Henry Broadhead. The theatre, which had a seating capacity of 1500, originally specialised in music hall variety.

J.J. Alley had already designed the neighbouring Grand Junction Theatre and Floral Hall (separately listed at Grade II) in 1901, and the Hippodrome was added onto its south-east end. It has been suggested that the two theatres were originally linked by an arcade, but there is no visible evidence for this. J.J. Alley also designed a number of other theatres in the Manchester area, many of which have since been demolished, but survivors include the Grade II listed Tameside Hippodrome (1904, with a 1933 Art Deco interior by Drury & Gomersall).

In 1905 the two buildings swapped names, with the former Hulme Hippodrome becoming the Grand Junction Theatre, and the Grand Junction Theatre and Floral Hall becoming the Hulme Hippodrome. Numerous stars of the early-mid C20 performed at the two theatres, including Laurel and Hardy, Nina Simone, George Formby, and Frank Randle.

In 1929 the Grand Junction Theatre was converted for cinema use and re-named the Junction Picture Theatre, and in 1950 the building was acquired by the James Brennan Circuit, who had already purchased the adjoining Hulme Hippodrome in 1938; both theatres were refurbished and redecorated at this time, and the Junction Picture Theatre was returned to live theatre use and re-named The Playhouse.

The Playhouse was sold to the BBC in 1955 and used as a recording studio for television and radio shows, which included the first radio recording by the Beatles in March 1962. Inter-connection between the Playhouse and Hulme Hippodrome

was blocked-up in 1955 and the BBC left in 1985. In 1988 the building became an Afro-Caribbean cultural centre known as the Nia Centre, which closed in 2000, and following years of disuse, the building has latterly been in use as a church.

Details

Theatre, 1902, by J.J. Alley. Red brick with white glazed-brick dressings, slate roofs. 3-storeys plus basement

**PLAN:** The Playhouse was originally surrounded by terraced housing, which has since been swept away by later re-development. The theatre has three principal elevations fronting Chichester Road, Warwick Street and Wilberforce Close. Attached to the north-west end of the building is the separately listed Hulme Hippodrome. Internally the theatre has a U-shaped auditorium aligned north-east-south-west.

**EXTERIOR:** South-east elevation: this wide 8-bay elevation fronting Chichester Road incorporates a series of original and later-inserted door and window openings, as well as a number of bricked-up openings. Paired white glazed-brick bands align with the window sills and lintels and are replicated to the building's other two elevations. The two bays to the far right have later tile cladding to the ground floor, which continues around the east corner and across the north-east elevation for a further 3-bays; this was formerly the theatre's east entrance and its three doorways are now covered externally by roller shutters. The first and second-floor windows contain casements (some of which have been altered) and have painted sandstone sills and lintels (the lintels incorporate a chamfered inside edge); the second-floor windows

are slightly shorter in height. The roof is hidden from view by a parapet that incorporates a dentilled band that continues around and across all three elevations, and also across the north-east elevation of the adjoining Hulme Hippodrome.

North-east elevation: this 6-bay elevation, which fronts Warwick Street is similarly styled to the south-east elevation with original and later doorways to the ground floor and casement windows (a number of which have been altered) to the floors above. A flat-roofed canopy depicted in a mid-C20 photograph of the building over the east corner entrance has been removed.

South-west elevation: this elevation, which fronts Wilberforce Close incorporates a number of later inserted windows to the ground floor and a later mezzanine level, which has been inserted into the back-of-stage area. Two large, arched, ground-floor openings have also been partly bricked-up and later openings inserted within, and the first-floor windows have been bricked-up. The second-floor windows have replaced glazing.

**INTERIOR:** internally the theatre has been subject to alteration in places, but retains its original stairs (most with replaced tread coverings), which access the various levels and exits; some have decorative plasterwork. Doors within the building are mainly later replacements. The u-shaped auditorium, which has two galleries (circle and balcony), has some mid-C20 alterations, but retains decorative Baroque-inspired plasterwork to the gallery fronts and the ceiling incorporates diamond-patterned panelling. The plasterwork is believed to have been gilded originally, but is now largely covered by

later paint. The stage has been extended into the stalls, but the original proscenium remains intact and is flanked by giant fluted Ionic engaged-columns, which support an entablature incorporating a trophy of arms. Both galleries are supported by painted cast-iron columns with stiff-leaf capitals. The circle has rows of seats to the central stage-facing section and side arms, whilst the balcony is set further back with straight rows to the centre section and slips that run along the side walls to the proscenium. The proscenium ends of the circle, which possibly held boxes originally, now house a bar area and toilets, and a later projection room is inserted to the centre of the balcony. The seating has been removed to the stalls and balcony, but that which survives to the circle is possibly original and includes double 'love seats'. A Wurlitzer organ that was installed from the Empress Ballroom in Blackpool when the BBC moved in has since been removed.

The theatre's east corner entrance contains three sets of late-1920s/1930s double-doors (covered by roller shutters externally) and a former kiosk that were probably inserted when the theatre was converted into a cinema in 1929. The original stage and the back-of-stage areas were converted into a cultural centre in the 1980s and have been altered and modernised with a steel-framed mezzanine level inserted along the south-west side. The basement contains a series of plain former dressing rooms.

Intentionally Blank



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