

About the Conservation Panel

Manchester's Historic Buildings and Conservation Panel was formed by the City Council in 1970 in the wake of the Civic Amenities Act 1967, which first introduced the concept of Conservation Areas, and the 1968 Ministry of Housing & Local Government Circular, which asked local authorities to consider:

"the setting up of conservation area advisory committees. mainly consisting of people who are not members of the authority, and to refer to them for advice, applications which would, in the opinion of the authority, affect the character or appearance of the conservation area.

Any committee should reflect a cross-section of local opinion. Nominations to serve on such committees could be sought from such bodies as the national amenity societies, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the Royal Town Planning Institute and any others which the authority think appropriate, and from county or other local archaeological, historical and civic and amenity societies.

The work of these advisory committees need not be confined to questions arising on applications for planning permission or listed building consent. They could also play a useful part in helping to formulate policies for the conservation area (including making positive proposals for their enhancement and measures for the general care and maintenance of the area)."

The panel as it now operates has several functions: It is a forum for discussion between members about planning policy concerning Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, it is a means of alerting the planning department to Listed or historic buildings at risk, and it is a resource for advice to Planning Officers and the Planning & Highways Committee about specific Planning and Listed Building Consent applications. The latter advice can be sought by officers during the pre-application consultation or the determination stages of an application, or both.

Members of the panel are nominated by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Victorian Society, Manchester Civic Society, the Twentieth Century Society, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), The Manchester literary and Philosophical Society, the Ancient Monuments Society, the Landscape Institute and representatives of other local heritage and civic societies.

Some of the members of the panel represent bodies who are always consulted regardless of whether or not an application is presented to the panel. The panel itself is not a 'statutory' consultee so the council is not obliged to present applications to it if the Planning or Conservation Officers consider that they do not need its advice. Sometimes, however, applications are put to the panel because its members have specifically requested to see them.

The advice given by the panel is intended to be a cross section of informed local opinion . The type of expertise offered by panel members varies widely according to the organisations they represent. Some have extensive and detailed knowledge about buildings from specific periods, or about particular Conservation Areas in Manchester, while others have practical experience of working with listed buildings and the technical and economic issues sometimes involved in their preservation and re-use.

Panel meetings, which are held monthly, typically commence with feedback from the city Conservation Officer regarding the status of applications previously reviewed, before proceeding to presentations of current applications (and pre-applications) by the Case Officers and discussion/ comment by the panel. The meetings end with topics raised by the panellists, such as buildings at risk, enforcement, suggestions for Listing etc.

When proposals brought before the panel are of exceptional importance and complexity the case officer may arrange for a scheme to be presented in person by the applicants or their agent - often their architect. In such cases, when appropriate, the buildings and sites affected may be visited by the panel.

Manchester City Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas Panel

The proceedings of each panel meeting are recorded by council officers. Once issued the minutes of the meetings are in the public domain and may be used by Planning Officers to convey the panel's advice to applicants and, where applicable, to the Planning and Highways Committee. Until the publication of the official minutes the advice given by the panel is confidential.

Manchester Society of Architects representation

The nomination of the five RIBA representatives on the panel is delegated to its local branch, the MSA. Although open to all panel members, the architect members of the panel have often been elected by the other members to leading roles. The current chairman Patrick Franks and vice chairman Glenn Ombler are both active members of the MSA.

MSA nomination requirements for panel membership

Because of their special role on the panel as advisers on the work of other professionals it is essential that the MSA nominated architect members of the panel have a good working knowledge of the city, and have substantial experience of working with its listed buildings and Conservation Areas. Prospective panellists should provide:

1. Evidence (via a CV) of current and/or recent experience of work on Listed Buildings in Manchester (e.g the area covered by the City Council). Local knowledge is essential in order to properly assess applications and in order to participate in the discussion and review of policy with respect to the city's Conservation Areas. Because the role involves the rapid assessment of submissions, experience of producing Heritage Statements and other planning application documentation would be advantageous.
2. A statement outlining the expertise (and special areas of interest) they can bring to the panel and perhaps a brief commentary on what they consider to be the key issues concerning conservation and Manchester's heritage generally.
3. A commitment to attend at least 60% of the meetings. Applications often return to the panel after amendment (or re-application after refusal) so it is important that the panel applies its advice consistently over an extended time period. Meetings are currently held from 1:45pm (usually ending 4-5pm on the second Tuesday of each month).