



**Conservation: reflecting a fear of the future?**  
**Mark Iddon on plans for the Library Walk, Manchester**

Proposals for a glazed walkway to enclose **Library Walk in Manchester** have been submitted for planning consent by Manchester architects Ian Simpson Associates (of Urbis and Beetham Tower repute). Library Walk is the curved passage way between two Grade II listed buildings - the Central Manchester Reference Library and the Town Hall Extension.

**Manchester Confidential**, a prominent What's On and Reviews guide to Manchester, is unimpressed with the plans and encourages its readers to write in and comment on the proposals during the planning consultation period. **Manchester**

**Modernist Society**

also encourages protest suggesting issues for objection, but are these protests as radical as they appear?

The buildings are currently being refurbished and plans already include linking the buildings at basement level. It was later decided to enclose the space with the introduction of barriers at each end. It would still be open to the public during the day, although supervised, and will then be shut from 10.00pm to 6.00am.

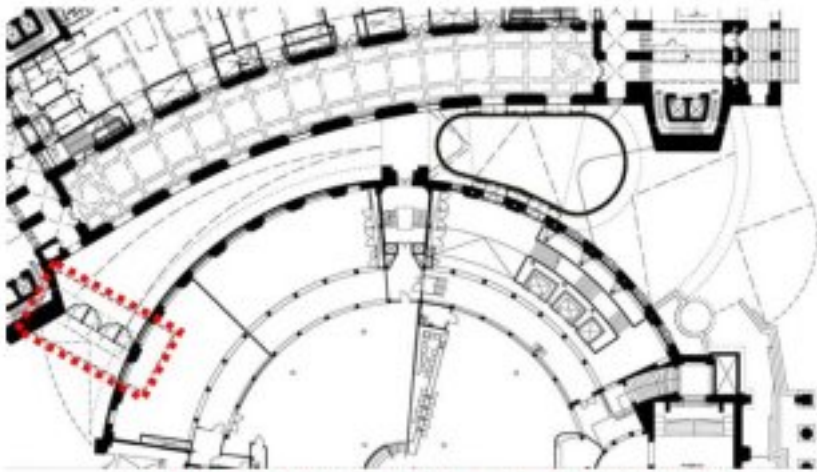
Central Library is an impressive rotunda building that makes reference to the Pantheon in Rome and was built between 1930 and 1934. Its foundation stone was laid by the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and it was opened by King George V in 1934. Work for the Town Hall Extension by Architect Vincent Harris started as soon as the Library was complete. Its 200ft. 8 storey South side forming a curve parallel to the Library resulting in a narrow passage way from the Friends Meeting House on Mount Street to the Cenotaph in St. Peter's Square. It houses the functional aspects, such as rates, planning etc, of Manchester City Council and was opened in 1938 by King George VI. It is connected on its North side by first floor link corridors to the mightily impressive gothic Town Hall, itself built in 1850's by Alfred Waterhouse at the height of Manchester's industrial expansion.

[Manchester Confidential](#) refers to Library Walk as Manchester's favourite little Street and makes much of its 'best loved and distinctive' status. The article notes that the concept for the new glazed walkway was by 'global architectural and planning firm' **H**

**OK**

and that the planning statement commissioned by them played down its attributes and is dismissive of the feelings of the people of Manchester. The Manchester Confidential article does end by asking questions with regard to architectural quality and design suitability and well as what is in the public's best interest.

[Manchester Modernist Society](#) make reference to the Manchester Confidential article, with a link to it, but appears to presume that the proposals should be opposed, and suggests aspects which may appear to be grounds for objection in planning law. It states that the proposals will compromise the integrity of the grade II listed buildings and have a detrimental impact on the conservation area. The sight lines between the Friend's meeting house and the Cenotaph will be lost and the privatisation of public space is a loss of public domain.



Plan of Library Walk showing the location of the 'glazed link' and the suggested position (within the red dotted line) for the new gates for which the design will be the subject of a design competition

[Library Walk Petition](#)