

Work on £70m transformation of landmark former Debenhams store to start

Work to transform a landmark former Debenhams store in Manchester city centre is to start in the New Year, it has been confirmed.

The Rylands building on the corner of Market Street and High Street is to be redeveloped into a mixed-use development comprising retail, leisure and office space, under the plans from global real-estate investment firm AM alpha.

The upper floors of the grade II-listed building will be transformed into office space while a shopping arcade will be created on the ground floor. A four-storey extension will also be added.

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Enabling works for the transformation of the vacant building have already begun, with main works scheduled to start in 2023 and completion expected in early 2025.

The news comes after plans for the £68.5m redevelopment were approved by Manchester City Council in January 2021.

The building has been vacant since Debenhams went into administration in December 2020. It had housed the department store chain since 1973.

It had been originally constructed as a warehouse for textiles manufacturer Rylands and Sons in 1932 and became a department store in the 1950s.

Stephan Schmid, senior vice president at AM alpha, said:

“Working with listed buildings is always a great privilege.

“We are proud to be able to give this historic Manchester landmark a new future and restore Rylands to its former glory in a very sustainable way. In this way, we are also helping to achieve Greater Manchester’s 2038 carbon neutrality target.”

Construction company Russell WBHO will act as a construction partner for the project while property companies OBI and Barker Proudlove have been appointed as letting agents.

Will Lewis, founding director at OBI, added: “It’s fantastic working with AM alpha on such an exciting project in our home town. Rylands is a well-known, impressive building.

“The property is close to bustling areas such as Piccadilly Gardens and the Northern Quarter and will appeal to many local businesses. Due to the sought-after location, we already see a lot of interest from potential future tenants.”

Gareth Russell, founder and managing director of Russell WBHO, said: “We are delighted to be working with AM alpha to revitalise the historic Rylands building and position it in the market as a highly sustainable building.

“With our extensive experience in historic preservation and sustainable building, we will make AM Alpha’s vision a reality.”

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