



St Peter's Square 2017 - a carpet of York Stone paving, integrating all elements and featuring a grove of scattered trees complemented with tram shelters



Library Walk between Central Library and Town Hall Extension



artist's impression, part of the competition design

DESCRIPTION

Manchester's Town Hall Complex Transformation Programme aims for a regeneration of the city centre that is attractive, service-oriented and open for all citizens. Complementing the refurbishment of the Central Library and the Town Hall Extension buildings, St Peter's Square forms a vibrant public open space towards the new buildings on the opposite side, and the core of this programme.

As a space it is strongly linked into the urban tissue, both by physical and visual connections and in terms of material by its York Stone paving featuring a characteristic edge treatment. The layout of the paving echoes the turn within the city grid at that location with an elegant curve, most significantly within Library Walk behind the Central Library. The same material was used for most other surfaces as a localised feature palette from sustainable sources in order to create a consistent appearance unique to St Peter's Square. For special places and elements materials such as Portland Stone were selected to build up a reference to the building faces; a look complemented with bespoke street furniture and indirect lighting to the trees and benches.

The result is a generous continuous surface that naturally connects the surrounding buildings historic and new, and invites pedestrians to move freely in all directions.

The square is characterised by a grove of scattered trees including the iconic Princess Tree forming a raised green canopy. Each tree is planted in a bespoke and highly sophisticated tree pit including devices for anchoring, drainage, root directing, lighting, power supply and drainage. Trees were also integrated into the four new tram stops within the square; to our knowledge, a first for the UK and complemented by the shelter structures in various shades of green glass.

The design also includes a raised planting bed with an integrated water feature in natural stone, a beautiful place to rest at the heart of the city centre: not only a compensation for the planting lost on ground level but also a reference to the work of Gertrude Jekyll.

ASSESSMENT

Now, and despite the need to accommodate an additional tram line, the square is liberated of individual traffic, de-cluttered and opened up generating a generous urban setting that works as a vibrant space for multiple daily uses and as outdoor event space for markets or special occasions like Remembrance Sunday parade and ceremonies.

The amount of people crossing or changing to the tram lines, populating the benches at all hours, admiring the fantastic lilac blossoms of the Princess Trees in spring or enjoying the water rippling across the surface of the water feature indicates the square has really become one of the most popular places in the city.