

HERITAGE & CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Application Details

Heritage, Conservation & Design team officer

Catherine Fenghour

Date

16 October 2025

Application reference

24/01002/HOUS and 24/01003/LBC

Address

1 Towncroft Avenue, Middleton, M24 5DA

Proposal

Conversion of existing garage into living space, construction of internal wall behind existing garage door, formation of internal doorway between dining room and converted garage, removal of living room fireplace, removal of games room chimney breast, replacement of sliding door to side of garage with window and application of cream paint to external front elevation doors

Affected Heritage Assets

Designated heritage assets

- 1 Towncroft Avenue (grade II)
- Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area
- 37 and 39 Rochdale Road (grade II)
- 51 and 53 Rochdale Road (grade II)

Non-designated heritage assets

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Summary

The proposal has been revised with many of the most harmful elements omitted. While there would be some harm to significance from the works, this would be at the lower end of less than substantial. This should be balanced against any public benefits derived from the proposal. It is noted that the applicant has stated that they will carry out repair works to the garage and these should be secured by condition, in the event that the officer is minded to approve the applications.

Assessment

Site description and significance

The application site is 1 Towncroft Avenue. Originally name The Studio, it was built as a photographic Studio and designed by eminent Middleton architect Edgar Wood. It is his first overtly modern design and was the first to use flat reinforced concrete roofs. Now a house known as Arkholme, it is an early example of Wood's pioneering modernism and is listed at grade II. Its significance comes from its early modernist design by Edgar Wood, its pioneering flat roofs, its rarity as a photographic studio and its virtually intact original interior and plan form. It is also of group value with nearby houses also designed by Edgar Wood and listed at grade II.

The site also lies in the northern part of the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area. In addition to the cluster of Edgar Wood buildings, this part of the Conservation Area is characterised by early 20th century development, set around the Middleton Cricket Ground.

Relevant legislation and planning policy

Section 16(2) and 66(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require local planning authorities to have '*special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*' when considering whether to grant listed building consent and planning permission respectively.

Section 72 of the same act requires local planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) deals with conserving and enhancing the historic environment. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance (para 212).

Paragraph 213 states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.

Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (para 215).

At a local level, Places for Everyone (PfE) policy JP-P2 and Rochdale Core Strategy (CS) policy P2 apply. PfE policy JP-P2 seeks to conserve, sustain and enhance Greater Manchester's historic environment and heritage assets and their settings.

CS policy P2 identifies key heritage assets, which includes the borough's listed buildings as well as the Edgar Wood and J.H. Sellers cultural heritage. This policy seeks to conserve, enhance and promote key heritage assets, which include the application site.

Assessment of proposals

The scheme has been revised and reduced during the lifetime of the applications. The originally proposed extensions have now been omitted. The works now entail: the removal of a fireplace within the dining room; the removal of an internal chimney breast within the games room; the conversion of the garage into habitable accommodation; the insertion of door between the garage and living room and the installation of a door replacing an existing window on the side elevation. The proposal also includes changing the colour of the woodwork from red to cream. The application is now also supported by a detailed heritage statement.

Each element is considered in turn below:

Conversion of the garage

The garage is mentioned within the list description as being built in the 1950s and not being of special interest. However, it appears to be present in photographs from the 1920s and as such is likely older than the list description states. Nevertheless, it is a later addition. Subject to details of internal finishes, including the boxing out of the garage door, it is considered that this element would have a neutral impact on the significance of the heritage asset.

There is an existing side door to the garage, which is proposed to be changed to a window. This door appears to be a relatively recent addition, and its replacement with a window would not in principle affect the special interest or significance of the building. For the avoidance of doubt this window should be fabricated of timber and details should be required by condition of the window and any brickwork repairs or rebuilding.

The current living room at the front of the property was the former photography studio and is of high significance. The proposal seeks to create an opening between this room and the garage. There is evidence of a window within the alcove, that was likely bricked up at the time the garage was built. There is now a cupboard within this alcove. There would be some loss of historic fabric resulting from the installation of a door within the alcove. However, given that the original window has been blocked up, the loss of historic fabric and subsequent harm to the significance of the listed building would be minor. Details of the new opening and making good as well as the proposed door should be required by condition. This door should be fabricated in timber. Subject to this condition, it is considered that this element of the proposal would result in a low level of less than substantial harm.

The proposal also includes the removal of two fireplaces and one chimney. One of these fireplaces to be removed is within the dining room which lies to the rear of the original studio. Previous research indicates that the chimney stack associated with the dining room fireplace was likely built in the 1950s. It is likely therefore that the fireplace within this room was installed at this time. Given its later date, there are no objections to its removal. It would have a neutral impact on the significance of the heritage asset.



The proposal also includes the removal of the chimney and fireplace within the games room. The submitted heritage statement advises that the games room is a later addition. However, it is first shown on the 1922 OS map, along with the house. Previous historic building recording states that this was once the service wing. It is noted that there is no external stack serving the chimney. Subject to details of the works and a scheme for making good, it is considered that any harm resulting from the removal of this element would be largely mitigated.

It is also proposed to repaint the existing front doors in cream. Historic images indicate that the doors have not always been red, and on that basis, there is no objection to the change in colour, subject to details regarding the proposed paint being required by condition:



It is noted that the applicant has said they will carry out repairs to the garage. A scheme for these repairs should be required by condition, as part of any public benefits in the event that the officer is minded to grant planning permission and listed building consent.

Suggested conditions:

Prior to commencement of development, the following details shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority

- a. Large scale details of new and replacement fenestration, including set back from face brickwork, sections through the head, jamb and cill, and details of any stiles, mullions, meeting rails and glazing bars. For the avoidance of doubt, all new and replacement windows shall be fabricated in timber.
- b. Large scale details of new doors, door casings and surrounds. For the avoidance of doubt all new and replacement doors shall be fabricated in timber.
- c. A scheme for the boxing in of the existing garage door, including details of internal finishes and materials
- d. A scheme for the making good and repair following on from the works to install the new windows and doors, including samples of any new brickwork and details of internal finishes.
- e. A scheme for the removal of the fireplace within the dining room and the chimney breast within the games room, including details of making good including internal finishes and materials.

Reason: To ensure the proposed development does not detract from the historical value or character and appearance of the listed building

Notwithstanding the details shown on the approved plans, prior to any external painting works, details of the proposed paint colour and finish shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure the proposed development does not detract from the historical value or character and appearance of the listed building

Prior to commencement of development, a schedule of repair works for the garage shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with this schedule.

Conclusions

The proposal has been revised with many of the most harmful elements omitted. While there would be some harm to significance from the works, this would be at the lower end of less than substantial. This should be balanced against any public benefits derived from the proposal. It is noted that the applicant has stated that they will carry out repair works to the garage and these should be secured by condition, in the event that the officer is minded to approve the applications.

Re-consultation

n/a