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Change of use of 256 Ashfield Road, Rochdale, from C3 Residential to F1 Teaching Centre

PLANNING & TRANSPORT STATEMENT (RevA)

1.0 INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

- 1.1 This Planning and Design & Access Statement has been prepared by RAD Design & Project Management on behalf of the Applicant, to accompany a planning application seeking consent for the change of use of 256 Ashfield Road, Rochdale, from C3 Residential to F1 Teaching Centre. This Statement should be read in conjunction with the accompanying plans and other documentation submitted alongside the application.
- 1.2 In response to much expressed demand within the ethnically diverse locality for a centre providing a Teaching Centre, the Applicant seeks consent for the change of use of the property for such purposes. Two previous refused applications (not identical) at the site are listed below
- 1.3 Since then, there has been a shift in local planning policy with the introduction of the Core Strategy. The application is accompanied by additional information including details of the proposed internal sound insulation, information regarding the number of users and their travel modes amongst other information / policy justification. It is therefore considered appropriate to re-submit this proposal.

- 1.4 The Applicant looks forward to working proactively with the LPA to bring about the scheme which would clearly cater for a local need. The following sections describe the site and its surroundings and the proposed development. It then sets out the relevant local and national planning policy context before assessing the proposal and concluding that the proposal meets the needs of the local community and is compatible with the site and surroundings. It is concluded that permission should be granted.

2.0 SITE & SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The site is located on Ashfield Road within the urban boundary around, 1 mile from Rochdale town centre. The area is primarily residential and is characterised by two storey, redbrick Victorian terraced streets, typical of Northern mill towns and is considered to be an ethnically diverse locality¹.

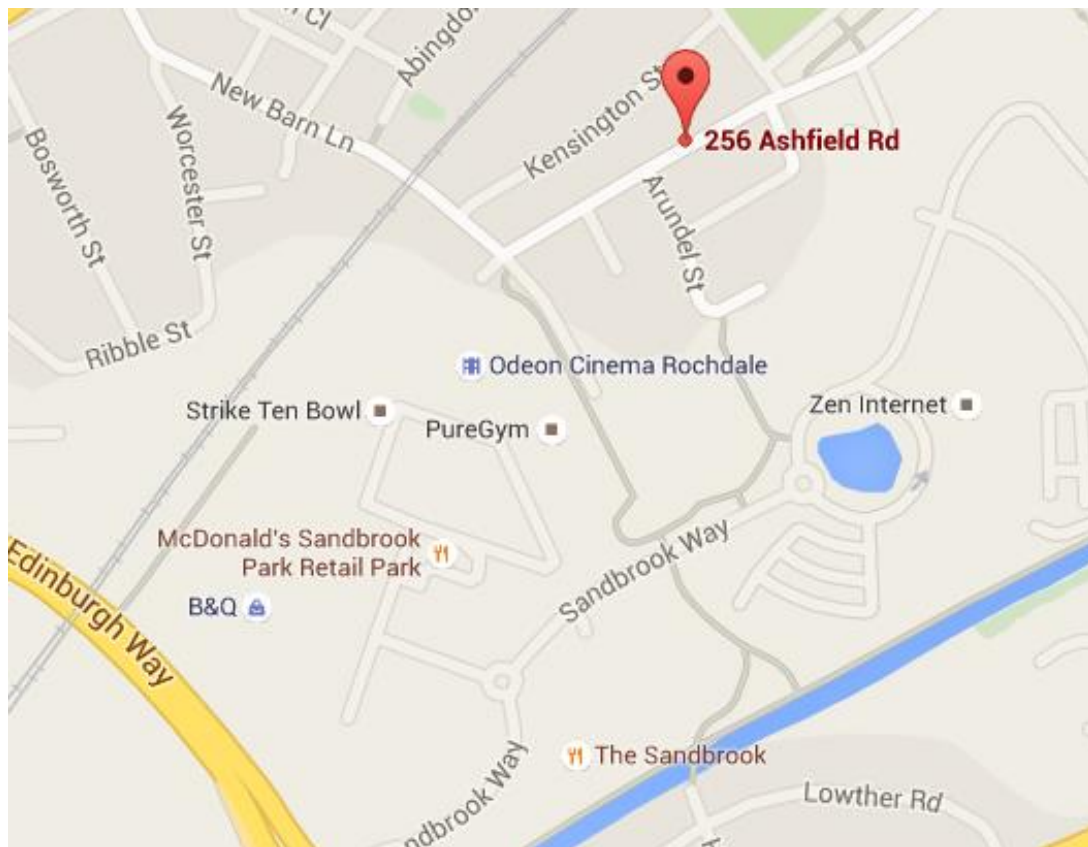


Figure 1: Site location

¹ C The ethnic breakdown of the Borough currently has a majority of 78.6% White British, with the second largest population being Asian or Asian British Pakistani, representing 10.5%. Rochdale has proportionally the second largest population of Kashmiri residents across England & Wales, with 1,658 residents. (2011 Census)

- 2.2 The site comprises a two storey end-terraced property as shown below and has previously operated as a launderette and shop, and retains a commercial front to the principle elevation.



Figure 2: Application site

- 2.3 The planning history of the site shows that permissions have been granted for various uses including a shop and part of the ground floor as an office. The current authorised use of the property at present however is a dwelling house.

- 2.4 A late night off-license operates close by whilst further south (250m) is the Sandbrook Retail Park which is home to a whole host of commercial activity including a Cinema, a McDonalds and a Gym. Ashfield Road is connected to the Retail Park by a public footpath adjacent to the Primary School at the bottom of the street.

Planning History

- Change of use from C3 residential to D1 teaching centre and place of worship Ref. No: 18/00289/FUL. Received: 6th Sept 2018 Status: Refused
- Change of use from C3 residential to D1 teaching centre and place of worship Ref. No: 14/01525/FUL. Refused 2015. Appeal Ref: APP/P4225/W/15/3135715) was dismissed in January 2016.
- Change of use from office/house to dwellinghouse (C3) - Ref. No: 13/01017/FUL Received: Mon 23 Sep 2013 Status: Approved
- Change of Use from Shop to Dwelling and Alterations to Front and Side Elevations - Ref. No: 93/D29327 Received: Sun 18 Apr 1993 Status: Approved

3.0 PLANNING POLICY

- 3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The development plan consists of the Rochdale Core Strategy adopted in 2016. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning agenda and should also be considered.

Rochdale Core Strategy (2016)

- 3.2 The following policy is of relevance:

- Policy DM1 - General development requirements - All development proposals, extensions and alterations, will be expected to demonstrate that they are of high quality design and take the opportunity to enhance the quality of the area
- Policy C8 - Improving community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities – the Council will support and promote the provision of better community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities (including places of worship). The Council will support such proposals for facilities outside centres provided they are highly accessible by a choice of transport, particularly sustainable modes of transport, and do not harm the character or amenity of the area

- Policy P3 - Improving design of new development – Development proposals should respect the context where it is, having regard to the scale, density, massing, height, layout, landscape, materials and access of surrounding buildings and areas in general.
- Policy T2 - Improving accessibility- Development will be appropriately located to minimise the need to travel by car and the number and length of car trips made to access local amenities.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 3.3 The central theme to the NPPF is to achieve sustainable development. The Government states that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: an economic role, a social role and an environmental role (paragraphs 6 & 7).
- 3.4 The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies. The NPPF lists 12 core planning principles which should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. One of the principles is that planning “should deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.”
- 3.5 Paragraph 70 of the NPPF requires planning decisions for social and cultural facilities to take account of an integrated approach to consider the location of housing, economic uses, and community facilities and services. The NPPF also mentions that planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of community facilities (such as meeting places, cultural buildings and places of worship) and other local services to enhance

the sustainability of communities and residential environments and guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services.

- 3.6 Planning policies should aim for a balance of land uses within their area so that people can be encouraged to minimise journey lengths for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities (para 37).
- 3.7 The NPPF places an emphasis on the effective use of land by encouraging the reuse of land that has been previously developed.

4.0 ASSESSMENT

4.1 The purpose of this section of the Statement is to identify and assess the main planning considerations raised by the proposals in the context of relevant national and local planning policy and guidance. The key issues, were an application to be submitted, would be;

- the principle of the development, having regard to the provisions of the adopted Development Plan and other local planning policy documents;
- the effect of development on residential amenity,
- the effect of development on the local highway network.

4.2 Each of these matters is considered below.

The principle of development

4.3 Both local and national planning policy place a great importance on planning positively for the provision and use of community facilities (such as meeting places, cultural buildings and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of

communities and residential environments (NPPF Para 70). One of the 12 core planning principles of the NPPF is that planning “*should deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.*”

4.4 It has long been norm that Community uses such as Churches, meeting spaces, halls and so on are traditionally located within residential areas to serve for community need. Mosques and Islamic Teaching Centres are common in many towns and cities across the country including Rochdale which has a high proportion of Muslim residents. They tend to be located within a residential setting, either attached to a residential dwelling or within a very close proximity, located on residential streets in order to draw in users from the immediate surroundings as opposed to attracting commuters from far afield. Appendix 1 provides a wealth of examples of such uses permitted by the Council and which operate without any known detriment to surrounding residential occupiers.

4.5 Although it is not a policy requirement to illustrate that there is a need for the development of community uses, it is obvious that there is a demand for the proposal. The proposed development would clearly be providing for local need; this is an ethnically diverse locality with a large population of Asian heritage. Small local Teaching Centres are used by children from Muslim backgrounds every day for lessons on the Quran and Islamic culture. Furthermore, at the time of the previous application, the Greater Manchester Police’s comments ‘*welcomes such centres as a valuable addition to the fabric of any community and recognises the importance of religious teachings*’. The Inspector also made similar comments:

“There is a substantial level of support within the local community for the proposal, and many of the representations suggest that there is a need for such facilities in the area. That level

of support and the benefit of the proposal in creating additional services to meet community needs must be given significant weight.”

- 4.6 The many letters of support submitted to the Council from local residents at the time of the previous application, as well as a local petition, clearly indicates the proposed use would serve the local community well. This compares with just a handful of objection letters received last time.
- 4.7 In addition to providing a community facility, the proposal would create 4 jobs; this should be welcomed in an area which is characterised by above average levels of unemployment such as areas of inner Rochdale.
- 4.8 On this basis, the proposal receives support from the spatial development policies of the adopted development plan and the NPPF advises that proposals which accord with the development plan should be approved without delay. The NPPF instructs that permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF as a whole or its specific policies indicate development should be restricted. The scheme will clearly deliver beneficial sustainable development for the local community that should be granted planning permission and it will not result in any adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of its approval. This is confirmed in the following assessment of the detailed material considerations relevant to the application.

Amenity

- 4.9 The accompanying plans clearly illustrate that the proposal would cater for a limited number of students and given the size of the building (with two small classrooms on the ground and first floor), the proposal cannot physically accommodate a large number of people. The site's planning history shows that there has been a variety of non-residential uses permitted at the property. This long commercial history includes the use of the property as a Laundrette and an Office; the existing commercial frontage is further evidence of non-residential uses being permitted. Given the long history of customers coming to and from the Laundrette facility for example, comings and goings to and from the site as a proposed education facility would be indistinguishable. Ashfield Road leads to a Primary School and a footpath to the nearby Retail Park; as such, pedestrian activity is apparent in the area and local residents are well accustomed to pedestrians passing regularly. It is within this context that the proposal should be considered.
- 4.10 The property is an end-terraced surrounded by an alley way as opposed to having neighbours to both sides. Nevertheless, an education facility is not considered a 'noise generating' use. With regards to internal noise transmission, given that it benefits from soft floor covering in the form of a carpet and where users are required to remove footwear, the potential for noise to be transmitted next door is greatly reduced. The operating hours sought are considered to be in keeping with the locality and can be controlled by condition. Moreover, the use of internal sound insulation can adequately mitigate potential issues and details of which can be found on the accompanying plans.
- 4.11 There is no sound or voice amplifier equipment being proposed as part of the proposal. Furthermore, there was no objection from the Council's Environmental Health dept. with regards to noise at the previous application.

4.12 To conclude, there is also no deviation from the NPPF which aims to secure good levels of amenity for all occupiers of land and buildings as one of its Core Planning Principles.

Highways

4.13 It is acknowledged that some highways concerns were raised at the previous application; this submission is accompanied by further detailed information regarding highways impacts and potential vehicular movements. The proposal seeks to cater for a small number of children who reside in the surrounding streets who will mostly attend the centre on foot². The accompanying plans clearly illustrate that the proposal would cater for a limited number of students and given the size of the building (with two small classrooms on the ground and first floor), the proposal cannot physically accommodate a large number of people. The Applicant considers the use of a Travel Plan and the promotion of walking to the centre as adequate means to minimise car travel, this can be controlled by condition. Furthermore, if anything, the proposal will have a positive impact on traffic generation as local worshipers will not need to travel by car further afield to attend a facility further afield, thus supporting of Policy T2.

Traffic calming and a one way system is proposed by the Council and is set to be trialled. This will significantly reduce traffic around the site and force users to walk, either from home or from points further away. However, only 17 students are proposed and often these are from the same household so cars will be relatively few.

It does not make sense for students closer to other similar facilities to travel to one further away so it will only be local children who live in the immediate vicinity who will travel to this proposed facility.

²

- 4.14 In assessing app. ref. no. 13/01017/FUL (Change of use from office/house to dwellinghouse) relating to the application property, the case officer confirmed that:

“.. the prevailing nature of parking in the area is one of on street parking, when the site was visited vehicles were parking on both sides of Ashfield Road and it was not resulting in any congestion or obstruction to the free passage of vehicles or pedestrians in the area.”

– Case Officer report for app ref no. 13/01017/FUL

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This Statement has justified the merits and acceptability of the proposed change of use of 256 Ashfield Road, Rochdale, from C3 Residential to F1 Teaching Centre. The centre would be a valued local community facility and highly regarded in the local area. It is considered that sufficient information has been submitted and in light of the new Core Strategy and additional information, a scheme can be permitted which is compatible with the surrounding locality in terms of amenity and highways.
- 5.2 The previous refusal stated there would be significant intensification of activity which would be detrimental but it is considered that only 17 pupils for a brief period in the late afternoon, with appropriate sound insulation cannot be in any way said to be significant.
- 5.3 The previous refusal also stated there would be significant detriment to pedestrian and highway safety but it is considered that the small number of pupils for a brief period in the late afternoon, many of who tend to be from the same family and arrive by foot, and in a busy urban location that is subject to a new traffic calming/one way initiative, again cannot be in any way said to be significant.

- 5.4 Paragraph 186 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should approach decision-taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development. It goes on to state in paragraph 187 that local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
- 5.5 Should the LPA require further information, it is requested that they contact the Agent.

Appendix 1. Similar developments permitted in Rochdale

An analysis of the location characteristics of other similar uses permitted by Rochdale Council has been undertaken as part of this application. The following examples of the many Mosques/Teaching Centres within residential settings of Rochdale operate without any known detriment to the Communities in which they serve:

Chishtiya Mosque/teaching centre, Milkstone Road, Rochdale.

Located on a busy one-way road, no on-street parking, surrounded by parking restrictions.



Harooniya Centre, Deeplish Road

Teaching Centre and place of worship situated in a residential area. The site has similar characteristics to the site in terms of its relationship to nearby residential properties. It has no dedicated off street parking, is located on a one way street and is adjacent to a large Groceries Store.



Merefield St/Ashton St Centre, Rochdale.

Within a residential area with similar characteristics to the site. No dedicated off street parking.

