



Project Background

Planning application ref:23/00335/FUL was submitted by Muller Property Group to redevelop the Parkfield House site at Manchester Old Road, Middleton as a care home and houses. Feedback from consultees has been mixed with suggested design improvements.

Bower Mattin and Young architects have been appointed by Muller Property Group to address the issues raised by the consultees and further develop the design of the scheme. This report has been produced to address those issues.

Twentieth Century Society (22nd May 2023) & Historic England (17th May 2023) Response

The Twentieth Century Society considered that the building could be brought back into viable use but did not provide any details as to how this may be achieved other than noting that there were no serious structural issues which would prevent its adaption and reuse.

This conclusion is not supported by a condition survey or took account of the evidence of a protracted marketing period which failed to produce a purchaser. Buildings of this age and type would require a more intrusive investigation into asbestos, roof condition and the degree of corrosion of the bolt fixings for the panels. The society recognise that the original 1960's building has been subject to alterations to windows and has been extended.



The argument that total loss of the building would be of considerable significance is therefore a non sequitur given the absence of listing. It ignores the potential to replace the building with one which is equal or better than the original.

Like the original Parkfield House the 1965 replacement has served its purpose and is no longer sustainable given its current condition and poor levels of insulation and energy efficiency.

In their letter of 17 May 2023 Historic England welcomed “the positive context in which this scheme has come forward and the ambition to bring back to use this vacant site”. They considered the principle and amount of development to be acceptable,

Whilst noting that the loss of the 1965 Parkfield House would negatively impact on the significance of the Conservation Area, Historic England “welcomed efforts to draw reference through the design to the current building but felt that if to be approved, then the designs should be revised to further reflect the 20th century building to be lost. The proposal did not adequately reflect the solid to void ratios and that the articulation of the elevations was too simply. They drew particular attention to the wealth and variety of the built environment surrounding the site.”



One of the tests of a balanced design is that the composition would be harmed by adding or taking away from the original building. These additions diluted the original design intentions.

The society admits that Parkfield House is not one of the exemplar Brutalist buildings by Lyons, Israel and Ellis as it is not a listed building unlike Oldbury Wells School, Upholland School, Royal National Theatre Studio in Lambeth and Wyndham Court in Southampton which they cite.

It is pertinent to note that all of these buildings are in the south of England where the climatic conditions are less likely to lead to premature staining and attract surface grime than in Middleton.



Planning Background

Historic England considered that for their concerns to be addressed the National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 189, 195, 197 and 200 were applicable.

Section 16 is now the relevant section in the new NPPF (December 2024). The notes below reference the relevant policies with explanatory notes in relationship to the application.

NPPF 202 Defines heritage assets being a range of those with local historic value to those of the highest significance which are irreplaceable.

In this case it is agreed that Parkfield House is a local heritage asset and therefore not so significant to have deserved listing or be irreplaceable. Historic England concluded that loss of the building would only pose moderate harm.

NPPF 203 requires local planning authorities to produce a strategy taking account of:

- (d) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
- (e) The wider social, economic, and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring.
- (f) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness
- (g) Opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.
- (d) and (e) are considered to carry less weight in this application than (f) and (g).



The council's conservation officer claims that Parkfield House is a non-designated heritage asset. As such NPPF 212, 213, 214 and 215 relate specifically to designated heritage assets and therefore in this case carry less weight. However, para 216 directs the local planning authority to consider a balanced judgment which takes account of the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. In doing so the LPA should consider the benefits of redevelopment. This is a case where, using the criteria of para 214, no viable use has been found from appropriate marketing and the perceived harm or loss is outweighed by bringing the site back into use.

Against this background the golden thread of sustainability which runs through the NPPF provides relevant tests of the proposed redevelopment when it demonstrably meets the economic, social and environmental objectives of the NPPF.

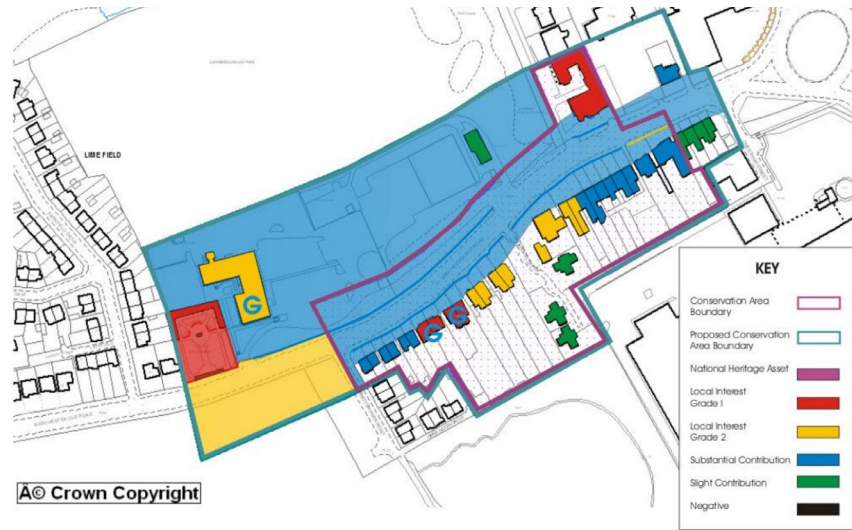
Economic objective: The care home helps to build a strong responsive competitive economy providing employment again on a vacant site.

Social Objective: The proposal delivers a range of new homes at a time of intense shortage and specialist care accommodation demand by an ageing population.

Environmental Objective: An unsustainable building is replaced with highly insulated, adaptable new homes which make use of renewables and smart energy controls

This policy analysis provokes the question as to how much benefit can be achieved by redevelopment. The following sections of this report show how the history, context and character of the area provide pointers for the new design and confirm that redevelopment makes a positive contribution to the Conservation Area. Not only does it remove a dilapidated, vandalised eyesore, it reinstates useful buildings of similar mass and form, which are detailed to provide a visual dialogue with their surroundings.

Manchester Old Road Conservation Area : An area in transition



The Manchester Old Road Conservation Area was designated in July 2010 and extended in March 2011 to include the Parkfield House site. At the time a local resident described:

“The former town hall is not attractively designed. It’s a concrete edifice the design of which is common enough around the country and has no pleasing attributes whatsoever. “

In their committee report, the officers described “the white former Town Hall (1965) by Lyons Israel and Ellis has a striking urban character in an otherwise suburban setting.”

In this the officers recognise that Parkfield House makes a divisive contribution to the Conservation Area. As a Brutalist building it acts as a counterpoint to the softer materials, detail and craftsmanship found in the Arts and Craft and Art Nouveau developments in the area. The reference to the Brutalist building as being strikingly different in its setting serves to validate that in any redevelopment a similar contrast in built form is acceptable in principle.

The short stretch of the Manchester Old Road before the Middleton Shopping Centre is described as “a leafy entrance to the town centre”. This statement underpins the importance of retaining the strong tree belt fronting Manchester Old Road.

However, despite its park beginnings, there has been a significant loss of open green space on the site. Although, the boundary wall and stone gate posts provide some definition to the site’s character.

Therefore, the new layout retains the trees and walling and slightly repositions the stone gate posts to cater for modern traffic widths and junction geometry,



The committee report explains that the first Conservation Area was focussed on a series of fine Victorian and Edwardian villas and terraced houses on the south side of Manchester Old Road. They are described as being of good quality with a variety of architectural styles while the building materials consisting of common brick and sandstone impart a consistency of colour and texture. Good examples being Broomfield 151 and Lyndhurst 120 Manchester Old Road (1902). The report continues by extolling the virtues of Edgar Woods houses at West Lea 161-163 with its retrained symmetrical design and tall Jacobean romantic chimneys plus the later Nos 165-167 being exemplar of Woods early modern architecture. The latter are very formally designed using triangular and rectangular shapes with large triangular gables.



There is agreement here that the architectural language of the Conservation Area is eclectic. No one style dominates. A key component is that despite differences in language the coherence and distinctiveness of the area is provided by a limited palette of materials and attention to detail evidenced in the craftsmanship of the builders.



The report rightly references the quality of the 1927 Garden of Remembrance . Particular attention is made to the formality of the gardens and symmetrical north-south axis giving a ceremonial character to a processional walk. Reference is made to the Art Nouveau style gates, and the articulately detailed brick walls, secondary buildings and the colonnade. They all work together visually to provide a coherent design which uses material and detail that contrast with Parkfield House.

One of the conclusions to be derived from the officer’s report is that the Conservation Area has always been in transition. In this context there is no reason to resist change when the proposal adds to the richness of the area and delivers a viable sustainable solution to redeveloping an otherwise underused dilapidated site. The proposal needs to reflect local built character whilst enhancing and defining the open spaces between. In this respect reference to the formality of the Garden of Remembrance and the earlier Victorian garden is justified. It serves as a means of defining the journey from the Garden of Remembrance through the site to the park beyond, as seen in drawing L013 Cenotaph View Comparison.

The Two Parkfield Houses: A Dichotomy of Style and Substance

The history of development on the site provides an intriguing insight to differing social values and how architecture was used to express them.

The Parkfield House of 1848 was constructed by a successful local magistrate, Thomas Ashton and deliberately designed to demonstrate status and good taste. It is telling that it was subsequently purchased by another magistrate after Mr Ashton. It may be described as:

Although built at the height of Victorian Industrial Revolution the 1848 Parkfield House used the Georgian Style of architecture. Photos show it to be of refined proportions. Originally a three bay Georgian block with a canted bay to the east and a porch with Tuscan pilasters. Here was a romanticised reference to the past combined with influences of the Victorian grand tour. The house was later extended to the west by two bays with a pediment on the west façade, aka Greco Romano.

The house was greatly enlarged in the mid-19th century with a long wing to the north-east of the main block, with another three-storey wing of three bays. There was a conservatory off the Drawing Room. Associated buildings include stables, coach house and farm buildings.

When it became Middleton town hall in 1925 it was modified again with removal of sash windows. After a period of decline following construction of the new town hall it was demolished in 1978.

The Parkfield House of 1965 tells a different story. Brutalism had become the language of confident post war reconstruction. It was well suited to producing an edifice ,which exuded the power of local government. Unlike now, the sensitivity and interpretation of local vernacular and environment took second place. The works of Gordan Cullen in his treatise on townscape, published in 1961 had yet to impact on the waning fashion of Brutalism. Now of course it is the bedrock of contemporary Design Codes which would have made the introduction of a Brutalist building more contentious since it plainly ignored the character and context of the area..



Historic England reference “the rhythm of the close-set glazing ,which surprisingly provide the building with a high void to solid ratio, and strong vertical and horizontal axis are important parts of its composition“. There is no attempt in their analysis to suggest that as far as Brutalism goes, Parkfield House is not, nor is an exemplar of the genre. Its relative importance is more associated with the architects reputation than a valued appreciation of the stained and dilapidated concrete building which now exists.

A conclusion from this tale is that with the evolution of society and the redundancy of former buildings there has never been any impediment to renewal on this site. The proposed redevelopment is consistent with the history of the site.



Designing with reference to local Character and Context

The proposed design is illustrated on the following drawings;

- L002 Rev I Proposed Colour Site Plan
- L004 Rev C Proposed Elevation Analysis
- L005 Rev A Proposed Colour Elevation_Care Home Front
- L007 Rev H CGI 1 Entrance View
- L008 Rev E CGI 2 Rear View
- L009 Rev E CGI Centotaph View
- L010 Rev A Care Home Plans
- L011 Rev C Development Comparison
- L012 Rev E Proposed Colour Site Sections
- L013 Rev C Cenotaph View Comparison
- L014 Rev B Proposed Hard Landscape Plan
- L015 Rev D Proposed Boundary Treatment Plan
- L016 Rev A Proposed Bin and Cycle Storage Layout
- L017 Rev A Proposed Gateway
- L100 rev F Type N Elevations
- L101 rev D Type N Floor Plans
- L102 Rev D House Type M Elevations
- L103 Rev C House Type M Floor Plans
- L104 Rev C House Type P Elevations
- L105 Rev A House Type P Floor Plans
- L106 Rev C House Type O Elevations
- L107 Rev B House Type O Floor Plans



Key Design Drivers

Site Layout: A classical interpretation of space between buildings

Retention of gated entrance into the site and reuse of the stone gateposts.

Retention of the boundary wall and trees adjacent to Manchester Old Road.

Retention of the central tree group.

Use of a “gated” entrance to the Care Home site following the local tradition associated with the Victorian and Edwardian villas.

Symmetrical definition of the main green space between the houses and the care home to visually form a square.

Location of plot 20 to create a “gateway “ in juxtaposition with the care home. This entrance to the square is designed to engender a sense of curiosity which is realised when entering the open space beyond.

The exit from the square to the park is hidden at this point of entry. It is roughly diagonally opposite. This spatial device is found in the ancient squares of Greek agora’s, Roman forums, and Italian piazzas.

Reference to the formality of these spaces is justified as the new green square is a transitional space from the absolute formality of the Garden of Remembrance to the more organic public park beyond the site. It provides a gradual sequence of spatial experiences leading from one extreme of mannered design to the informal park.

Integration of carparking. This is achieved by breaking the parking into small landscaped groups.

Use of small-scale materials when entering the green square to support the feel of a shared surface. Use of boundary brick walls like those in the Garden of Remembrance to link the buildings into the landscape.

Softer hedging to rear gardens and facing the park. This provides a better visual link to the park, is not visually oppressive and adds a more bio diverse habitat.

Key Design Drivers

Care Home

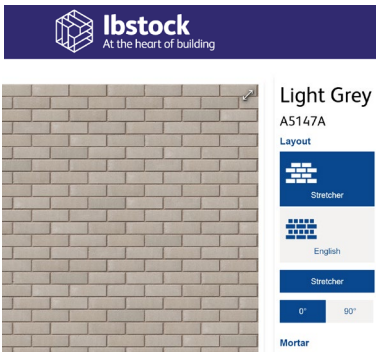
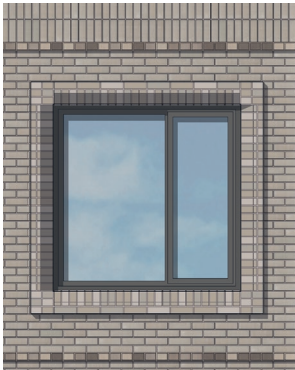
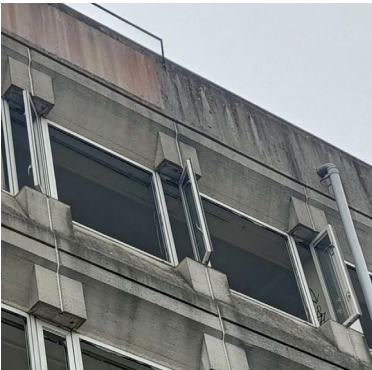
A Care Home of smaller mass yet similar form to the 1965's building using simple, elegant elevations with a flat roof.

Use of Light Grey Ibstock brickwork in lieu of concrete which provides a softer appearance and reference to the traditional materials found elsewhere in the Conservation Area. Unlike concrete the brickwork will weather better in the north of England.

Close attention to window surround detailing to generate articulate design with attention to craftsmanship.

Careful referencing in the new scheme to the solid and void ratio found in the Brutalist structure.

Use of repetitive patterns in the detailing to define the vertical and horizontal axis.



Townhouses

Use of 2.5 and 3 storey town houses to create cadence in the roofline.

Dominant use of articulate brickwork with detailing which reflects the work of Edgar Wood.

Use of strong gables, again reflecting the Arts and Crafts approach.

Division of the facades to create clear verticality similar to the local villas.

Use of triangles and rectangles in subdividing the elevations.

Positioning of the townhouses to provide continuity of street scene and a clear sense of enclosure to the public space.





As a leading exponent of Arts and Crafts architecture, Edgar Woods work in the Conservation Area illustrates key features associated with the movement. These are:

Asymmetrical Form using different planes and roof lines

Clarity of form reflecting the internal room arrangements, using simple shapes

Attention to detail with high levels of craftsmanship, often involving decoration using traditional materials.



The proposed villas are designed in groups of 2 or 3 units to develop an element of asymmetry in the street scape. Steep bold roof pitches and strong gables relate to Wood's work and the cadence in rooflines by use of differing heights engenders an element of playfulness in the facades which invites closer examination.

This approach is clearly emphasised using corbelled brickwork supporting slightly projecting piers / bays on the frontages. Here also decorative brickwork increases an attention to detail and need for craftsmanship. The use of double gablets is equally symptomatic of the movement.

The proposed villas clearly define the edges of the green square. Whilst providing the "walls" of the external room which is the green square, they are deliberately staggered to introduce an organic element to the layout.



This is again typical of an Arts and Crafts approach to estate layouts, and can be found in the work of Edwin Lutyens at Speke Garston and similar estate layouts of Welwyn Garden City which evolved from the Arts and Crafts movement.

Key Design Drivers

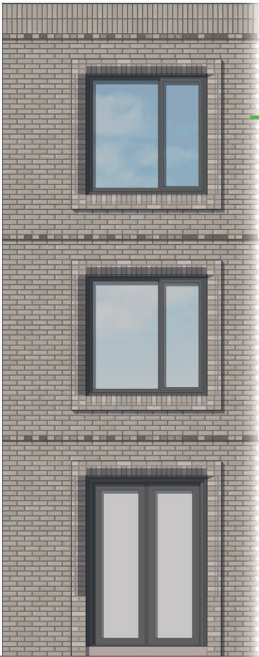
Summary

Brutalism was not exclusively characterised by concrete. Examples such as Smithdon School in Huntstanton, Langham House Close in Ham Common, Park Hill Estate in Sheffield and St Bride’s Church in East Kilbride show how brickwork could be integrated into a Brutalist design.

In this case part of the character of the area is delivered in brickwork. The houses of Edgar Wood provide examples of Arts and Crafts and this is also reflected in the buildings and boundary walls of the Garden of Remembrance.

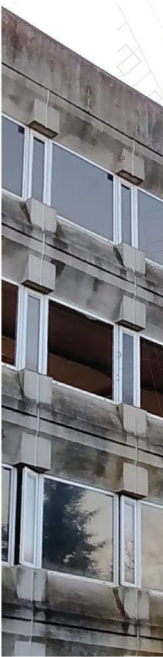
Redevelopment of the Parkfield House site offers an opportunity to create a fusion between the starkness of the existing former town hall and the softer more articulate detailing and materials associated with the work of Edgar Wood.

To be successful the new designs avoid the trap of being pastiche but instead utilise form and proportion which have references to the past and the proposal is a wholly honest reflection of their function.



Proposed Detail Elevation

- Chamfered bricks reflect window form
- Grey brick detailing reflects concrete massing
- Window form and regularity in brutalist manner



Existing Elevation Detail



Precedent
Modern Brick Detail
Bureau de Change



Precedent
Exeter Library
Louis Kahn





Pinch Point Section BB - Glazed Stairwell Overlooking



Proposed Front Elevation - AA



Existing View from Memorial Gardens



Existing View from Car Park - East



Existing View from Car Park - North



Project Parkfield, Middleton, Manchester, M24 4EB				
Title Proposed Elevation Analysis				
Scale 1:100	Date Feb 25	Drawn By JG	Check By JG	Original 23690
Revised By L	Revised Date -	Revised Reason -	Revised By C	Revised Date 004





Summary

In their letter of 17th May 2023 (ref P01559445), Historic England commented that “the loss of the bold white concrete building would have a moderate level of harm on the significance of the conservation area.”

This report demonstrates that the proposal is a sensitive design evolved from balancing the eclectic architectural character of the Conservation Area with contemporary needs. It is as honest and appropriate as its predecessors on the site, but has been evolved from a closer analysis of the local character and context.

The new homes and care facility will adopt at least 10% renewables combined with energy performance standards which will deliver a sustainable scheme appropriate to national and international concerns over climate change.

The scheme therefore provides discernible benefits:

Bring unused land back into economic use.

New housing to assist in meeting national and regional targets

A care home for the increasing elderly population

Employment

New green spaces for care home residents as well as improved publicly accessible green space around footpath.

Introduction of significant social policing on a site which has a reported history of drug taking, anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

Introduction of buildings which have been sensitively designed to reflect and evolve from local architectural presence which characterise the conservation area.

Removal of a building which locals have described as an eyesore.

Delivery of environmentally sustainable buildings reacting to the climate change agenda.

The proposed design delivers positively on the economic, social and environmental sustainability objectives of the NPPF. On balance any perceived disadvantages by loss of a locally unloved, unwanted building are more than offset by the positivity of the proposed scheme.

On balance the proposal is not harmful and will deliver positive visual, social, economic and environmental benefits which should be supported.

