

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	14.04.25
Application Reference	24/00993/FUL
Address	Land Opposite To 1-35 Bentley Street, , Rochdale , OL12 6EU,
Proposal	Erection of two apartment blocks comprising 23 apartments (13no 2 bed and 10no 1 bed apartments), together with associated parking and landscaping.

Introduction

The [National Design Guide](#) sets out the ten characteristics of a well-designed place. Well-designed places have individual characteristics which work together to create its physical **Character**. The ten characteristics help to nurture and sustain a sense of **Community**. They work to positively address environmental issues affecting **Climate**. They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#).

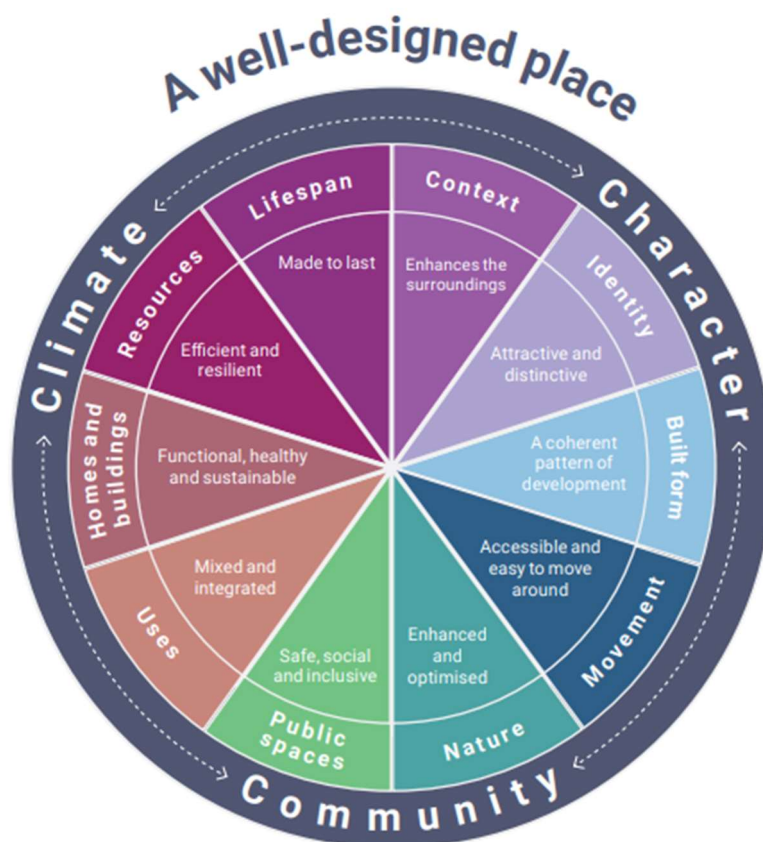


Figure: The ten characteristics of a well-designed place

Source: National Design Guide, 2021

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Reason(s) for Consultation

- Building design and materiality

Scheme Image(s)



Source: Application submission

Assessment

This assessment has been made against:

National Guidance:

- The National Planning Policy Framework
- The ten characteristics of a well-designed place contained within the National Design Guide
- National Model Design Code
- Building for a Healthy Life design toolkit

Local Policy:

- Rochdale Core Strategy policies:
 - EI – Establishing thriving town, district and local centres
 - S03 – To improve design, image and quality of place
 - P1 – Improving Image
 - P3 – Improving design of new development
 - DMI (General Development Requirements)
- Rochdale Borough Unitary Development Plan
- Supplementary Planning Documents:
 - Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide
 - Oldham and Rochdale Residential Design Guide
- Places for Everyone (PfE) Joint Development Plan

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

- G/BE/1 - Design Quality
- BE/2 - Design Criteria for New Development

SUMMARY

Comments on the layout are limited, as many of these issues were addressed during previous pre-application consultations. However, the parking layout would benefit from improved screening at the point of entry. Design amendments are necessary to avoid large, blank elevations, which currently appear monolithic. To improve the overall massing and scale, I would recommend that the three-storey elements adopt a flat roof design. The choice of materials will be critical to the visual success of the scheme.

It would be advisable to arrange a meeting with the applicant and design team to discuss these points further. I would also like to be reconsulted on any revisions and at the discharge of conditions stage.

Policy

Paragraphs 131 and 135 of the NPPF state that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area and are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping, which is largely reflected within Policies DMI and P3 of the Council's adopted Core Strategy, which requires development proposals to demonstrate high quality design.

Previous Site Application Discussions

No urban design advice was given at pre-app stage.

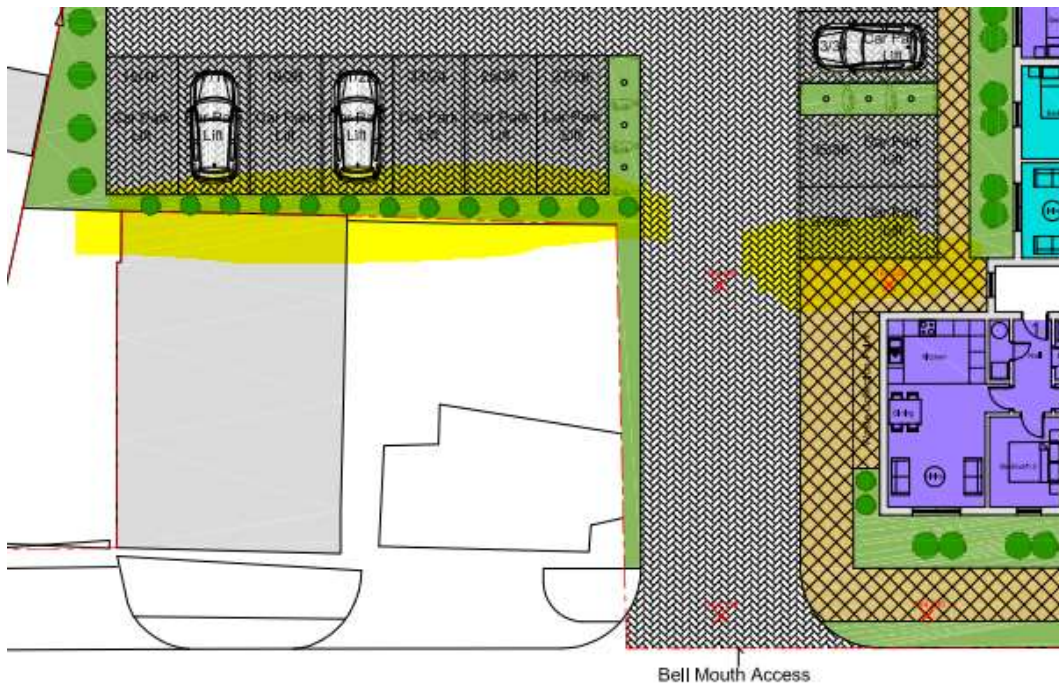
Comments in this consultation are limited regarding site layout and apartment configurations as there have been previous discussions with the planning officer and agent.

In the scheme presented (PREAPP/00047/23), the planning officer was generally satisfied the form and character of the apartment blocks would be acceptable within the existing character of the area, whilst achieving a higher density. There were concerns the building risked looking overly monolithic and concerns regarding the visual dominance of the car park were expressed.

The overall site plan since the pre-application has not changed much so problems such as the parking layout persevere.

Layout

I would echo previous comments about the parking layout being too prominent. It is not the most welcoming of entrances already (existing MOT centre) and we encourage applicants to avoid dominating frontages with parking. With the challenges of the site noted, the parking area would need some visual screening to act as a much needed buffer. Some small planted areas are shown to the left hand side parking area but this does not look like it would act as a buffer; this would be more effective with a larger hedge or trees. Similarly to the right side, the first parking spaces on approach have no visual buffer at all and would benefit from a similar screening strategy.



Context

The architecture of the surrounding area is quite haphazard and mismatched. As a result, the visual amenity in this area is quite poor. This should not however give a reason to lower design standards, on the contrary, the proposal has the opportunity to kickstart positive urban development by raising design standards in the area. The Building for a Healthy Life toolkit makes references on not justifying 'more of the same' if nearby development is to a poor standard.

The elevation fronting Bentley Street appears to reference the form and character of the existing terraced row. These existing terraces are defined by a consistent rhythm of fenestration, with regularly spaced windows contributing to the street's character. Unfortunately, the proposal does not fully capitalise on the opportunity to echo this pattern in its façade.

Flat roof / pitched form?

There is a question around the roof form—flat or pitched? If the three-storey blocks retain a pitched roof, are there added benefits, such as introducing rooflights? It would be helpful to see a visual comparison showing the impact of a flat roof on the three-storey elements. A flat roof could align more closely with the front elevation's roofline and help reduce the visual dominance of these taller elements.

In general, urban design principles tend to place greater massing on corner plots or site perimeters. However, there is an understanding that the proposal aims to respond to the scale and form of the existing terraces along Bentgate Street. To explore this, I have begun modelling with simple white massing blocks.



Design

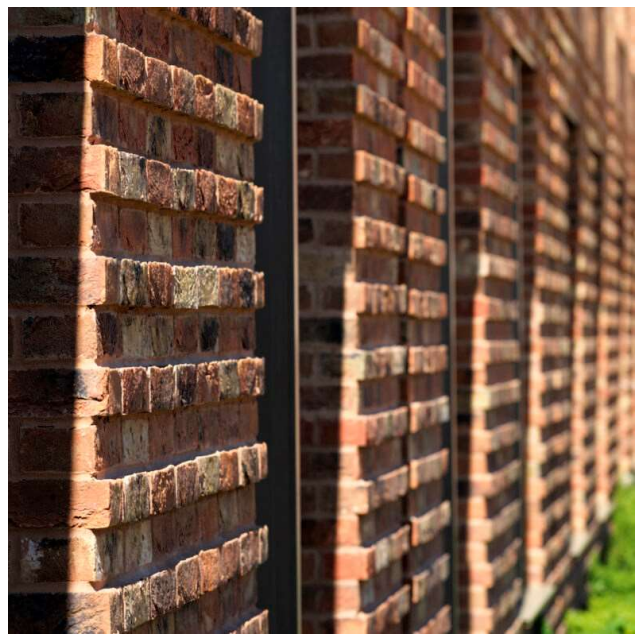
The proposed elevations appear rather blank and lack sufficient visual interest. This issue is compounded by the quality of the submitted drawings, which do not effectively convey the depth, articulation, or setbacks of the various building elements. Incorporating shadows and more accurately representing materials rather than relying on simplistic CAD fills would significantly improve the clarity and effectiveness of the drawings.

Larger windows and better brick articulation would help alleviate this. Brick elevations can be enriched through the use of recesses and projections which the architect has attempted in parts. Structural depth can be created by employing deep window reveals and varying the depth of facing materials. Where the sub division of a façade is less apparent, it is sometimes necessary to employ vertical shadow lines/niches to break it up. Examples below show where this has been done well and where it has been less successful.

(left) More effective at breaking up a blank elevation
(right) Less effective. Elevations are blank and brick dominated.



At present, the architectural treatment of the façades feels unremarkable and lacks a strong identity. I would encourage the design team to explore relevant precedents—particularly apartment buildings in urban settings that demonstrate high-quality materiality and thoughtful articulation. These could serve as valuable inspiration and help elevate the architectural response.



Material and colour differences would therefore work better when respective levels are banded i.e. ground floor may have a different material treatment or detail At the uppermost storey another.

Hulme Living Leaf Street Housing | Meccanoo (Image Greg Holmes)



Wellbourne, Tottenham Hale | Pollard Thomas Edwards

Internal Impact

There is clear potential to increase the size of the apartment windows without negatively impacting the internal layouts. In particular, the bedroom windows are currently too small and narrow, resulting in less desirable internal spaces. Enlarging these openings would not only enhance the quality of the interiors but would also improve the external appearance of the building. Consider the proportionality - why, for example, are the bedroom windows not aligned in height with the living room windows? Adjusting this could help establish a stronger rhythm and greater coherence across the elevations.

The side and gable elevations also require further attention. Introducing narrow slot windows, particularly at the corners, would add visual interest and help address concerns about blank or inactive façades.

Additionally, opportunities have been missed in the treatment of the internal corridors. The position and type of glazing could be reconsidered to improve the quality of these spaces and provide apartments with views to the rear, enhancing both light and outlook.



High-quality design is critical to ensuring that new developments contribute positively to their context and deliver long-term value to the community. As it stands, the design is visually weak due to the poor articulation of materials and unengaging façade(s). However, these issues are all resolvable through further design development.

I would recommend a design workshop with the architect to review these points in detail and help move the scheme forward positively.