

HERITAGE & CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Heritage, Conservation & Design Team Officer	Catherine Fenghour
Date	28 May 2025
Application Reference	25/00314/FUL and 25/00315/LBC
Address	1 Drake Street, Rochdale, OL16 1RE
Proposal	Listed Building consent for internal alterations to first and second floors to facilitate change of use from vacant commercial floorspace to 10no residential apartments (use class C3)

Heritage Assets Impacted

Designated Heritage Assets	☒	- 1 Drake Street (grade II) - Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area -
Non-Designated Heritage Assets	☐	

Summary

With amendment and clarification, it is likely that this scheme can be supported.

Assessment

The application site is an 'L' shaped building on the corner of Smith Street and Drake Street. Originally built as a townhouse for a wealthy, local woollen merchant, it was converted into a hotel in the early 19th century. The ground floor was last used as a restaurant although it is now vacant. Part of the first floor has already been converted into apartments, with the rest of the building currently vacant. The upper floors were last used as a nightclub.

Externally, the building retains much of its original grandeur and occupies a prominent position on the corner of Drake Street. It has links to the town's woollen industry as well as being the town's main coaching inn during the 19th century. It also provided the backdrop for important political movements, including the gathering following the 1832 Reform Act. It is of high architectural

and historic significance, as well as making an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The first and second floors of the building have been heavily altered, with walls removed and new partitions installed, particularly on the first floor. Some areas of the historic lath and plaster ceilings and walls survive, as well as the timber roof structure. Most of the internal decoration has been lost although there are some small areas of surviving skirting board and coving. The historic stairs to the loft are still in-situ. The loss of much of the interior detailing has negatively affected the ability to interpret its historic use as a townhouse or a hotel.

Planning permission and listed building consent have previously been granted for the conversion of the building into residential use (13/0166/FUL and 13/00199/LBC refer). There is an extensive planning history for the building as a whole.

Given the level of alterations and the removal of many original walls, it is considered that the partitioning of the space into residential apartments is unlikely in principle to materially harm the significance of the listed building. As such the principle of apartment use in heritage terms is acceptable.

The existing plans, appear to have some inaccuracies/omissions and these need to be corrected before the applications can be determined. Inaccuracies include the position and existence of walls and windows and the position of neighbouring properties. There are also substantial levels changes across the building. Existing and proposed long sections are required so that these, and any changes to them can be properly understood.

The plans indicate that the proposals would reinstate original windows. However, as the new openings would be significantly larger than the original, this description is not entirely accurate. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the new windows would be along secondary elevations, which are less prominent and have been more heavily altered.

While there would be some loss of historic fabric from the insertion of new windows, it is considered that the overall level of harm would be low, subject to appropriate detailing and making good. The replacement of the fire door with an appropriate window would improve the appearance of the listed building, as would the removal of the external wooden staircase structure (although the weight given to this is limited, as it does not appear to have been constructed as approved? - see 18/00555/LBC) To minimise the level of harm, conditions should be imposed requiring the windows to be fabricated in timber and for large scale details to be submitted. Stone lintels should also be instated to match the existing situation.

The installation of new rooflights would result in the loss of some historic fabric, although again as these would be on a rear slope, the harm would be limited. To reduce this harm, the new rooflights should be conservation style and set flush with the roof.

The loss of the second-floor staircase up to the loft space is regrettable, as this appears to be one of the few surviving historic elements. This element is not mentioned within the heritage statement. This needs to be updated. The scheme should be reworked, so that this staircase is retained, even if it is not used as part of the proposal. The loss of this staircase would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage asset.

A schedule of repairs and finishes should be submitted, either by condition or up front as part of the application. This should include details of new fittings such as walls, doors, joinery and

secondary glazing. It should also include provisions for the retention of surviving historic fabric, including the coving, skirting boards, timber floors and lath and plaster ceilings and walls. Where elements are too damaged to be incorporated into the scheme, they should still be retained in-situ. This should be done for each of the spaces. A recording of the space should also be carried out (i would suggest level 2 would be appropriate given previous interventions).

Given the evidence of historic skirting boards and covings, these provide evidence of the historic design and can be incorporated into the internal scheme for the property. This would constitute a heritage benefit which would be weighed against some of the harm identified elsewhere.

Elements of the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the building. Revised plans/information are needed so that the full extent of these can be properly assessed. In accordance with NPPF paragraph 213, any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.

Where a development 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 including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use (NPPF paragraph 215).

In this instance, the proposal would bring the vacant upper floors of this building back into use. Residential apartments are a use which would secure the long-term viability of the building and prevent further decay. it would also increase footfall and activity within the Rochdale Conservation Area and would secure the future of this important building.

Subject to the amendments and clarifications requested above, it is likely that the proposal can be supported in heritage terms.

Re-consultation

Please reconsult if revised plans are submitted, so that i can provide draft conditions