

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	21.05.25
Application Reference	25/00312/FUL
Address	Land adj. to Celsius Air Conditioning, Well St. Hey Land At Junction Of Water Street And Molesworth Street, Rochdale
Proposal	Development of a drive-thru restaurant (Use Class E / Sui Generis) with associated access, servicing, car parking, hard and soft landscaping, substation, engineering works and other associated works

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](#).

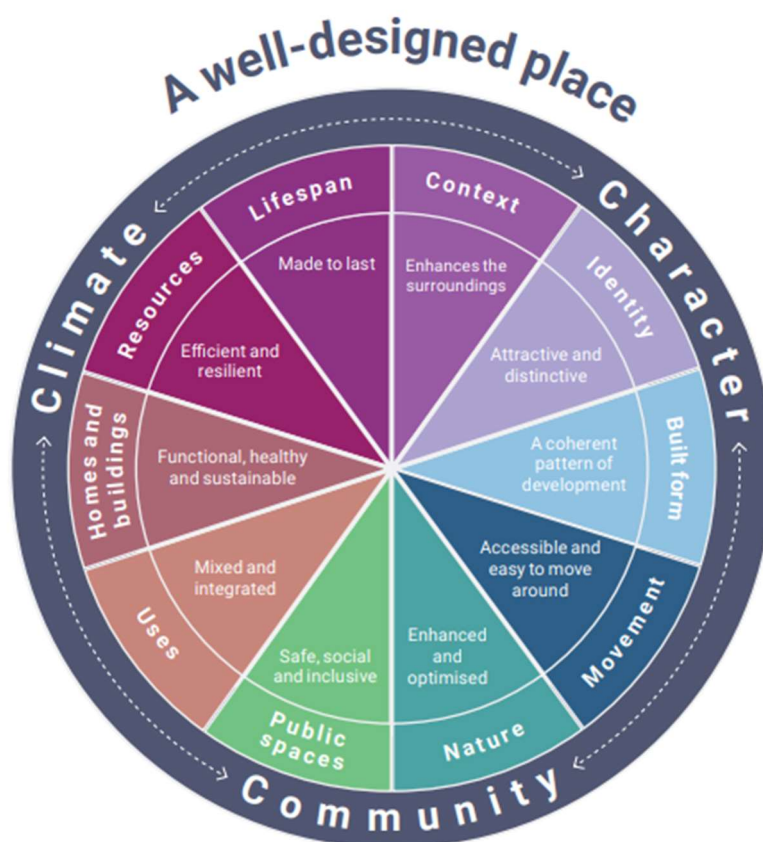


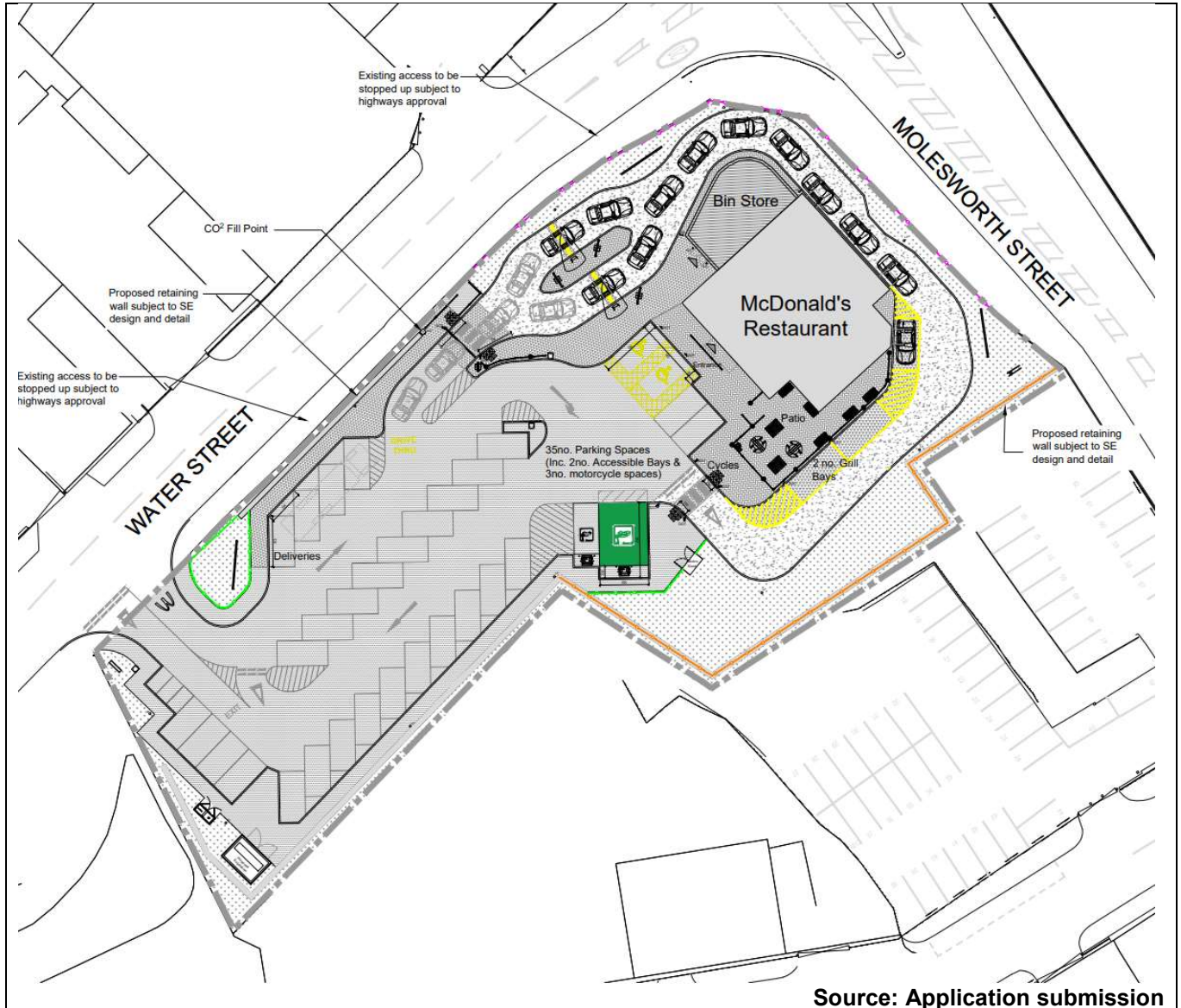
Figure: The ten characteristics of a well-designed place

Source: National Design Guide, 2021
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Reason(s) for Consultation

Building / Urban design

Scheme Image(s)



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:
 - S03 – To improve design, image and quality of place
 - P3 – Improving design of new development
 - DMI (General Development Requirements)
- Supplementary Planning Documents:
 - Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide

The Unitary Development Plan

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

SUMMARY

The scheme regrettably replicates a standard out-of-town drive-thru prototype, which is fundamentally ill-suited to an urban context. This design fails to improve the existing character of the area, even though it is currently visually poor. By presenting blank facades and open views into parking spaces, the proposal misses a critical opportunity to establish a strong corner frontage and contribute positively to place-making in this central location.

Furthermore, the lack of adequate screening and landscaping buffers, alongside the inclusion of a large and unsightly retaining wall, exacerbates the visual detriment. The development perpetuates a pattern of poor design.

I am therefore unsupportive of the proposal.

Context

Whilst I accept the existing site functions as a car park and the immediate vicinity is not the most attractive, this should not mean a continuation of the status quo. The Building for a Healthy Life toolkit warns against using poor development to justify further poor development.

Despite the site being located in the town centre, no strategic policy or allocation has been earmarked for this site.

Design

The overall layout is poor, offering weak and inactive frontages to all surrounding streets. Along Molesworth Street and Water Street, blank elevations and open car parking dominate the streetscape, offering no meaningful enclosure, active frontage or positive screening. There was an opportunity to improve the corner of the site and this has not been utilised. The proposal represents poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of this visually poor area, thereby undermining policy to promote high-quality urban design.

There is excessive hardstanding and parking dominance with too much impermeable surfacing and car parking, which visually dominates the site and lacks adequate screening. It is unclear from the proposals how landscaping and green infrastructure helps to soften the developments impact, screen service areas etc.

There is a large retaining wall dominating the site and the application does not adequately tackle the visual implications of this. Furthermore, the large retaining wall exerts an overbearing visual presence on the site, with the application failing to adequately mitigate its adverse visual implications. This poor integration with the surrounding context is consistently demonstrated throughout the scheme. An additional concern is the visual impact of the two-lane driveway immediately abutting Water Lane, which effectively creates a four-lane expanse of impermeable surfacing, further exacerbated by the visual and environmental implications of static and moving vehicles.

Whilst acknowledging there is a brand merchandise dictating the design, the proposal remains anonymous and not contextual; this simply appears as if a standard out-of-town drive-thru prototype has been dumped onto the site.

The elevations are dominated by blank facades with a concerning ratio between fenestration and blank walls. With this in mind, the scale of the building appears insensitive. The internal layouts are dominated by back of house spaces and therefore provide limited scope for an active frontage with glazing. Positioning the bin store on the corner is also a weak design move; this corner junction could be something quite significant architecturally and instead this is another key elevation that has been taken up.

Policy

NPPF Paragraph 135 - Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design guides and policies. Similarly Paragraph 136 references how developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development.

Rochdale Core Strategy Policy P3 expects all new developments, including associated landscaping, regardless of location, to adhere to high standards of design. The Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide SPD provides guidance on how developments should reflect and improve the qualities of the local area through their street pattern, building scale, layout, and materiality.

The 'out-of-town prototype' fails to uplift the urban context. The blank facades, large parking views, and unaddressed retaining wall do not improve the character of the area and I would therefore be unsupportive of the application. Even though a refusal of permission would prolong the current, unsatisfactory appearance of the land, this should not be justification to allow development of poor design. Given its prominent location on a busy highway, the site offers a crucial chance to spearhead redevelopment and improve the design standards of this largely commercial and car park-heavy part of Rochdale.