



YEARGATE LIMITED

BIRCH BUSINESS PARK UNIT B

Heritage Impact Assessment



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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1. This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been prepared by WSP on behalf of Yeargate Limited to assist Rochdale Borough Council (the Council) in the determination of an application at Birch Business Park located to the south west of Heywood, to the north of the M62 in Rochdale. The content of this report has been prepared to accord with all relevant national and local policy and guidance.
- 1.1.2. The proposal is for the demolition of existing units B and G and erection of a B2/B8 warehouse unit with ancillary Class E (Formally B1(a) office) space at Birch Business Park including ancillary office, parking and servicing areas, associated works and infrastructure.
- 1.1.3. The council has requested that this HIA be prepared to support the application on the basis that the application proposals have the potential to impact upon designated and non-designated heritage assets.
- 1.1.4. This report assesses the impact of the proposed development on both designated and non-designated heritage assets in the surrounding area, in order to support the LPA in determining the application.
- 1.1.5. The information in this report is based upon an appropriate range of sources of information. These sources include information gathered from relevant planning history, listing information provided by Historic England and information provided by Rochdale Council.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The HIA has the following structure:

- Section 1 provides the introduction;
- Section 2 identifies and describes the site;
- Section 3 presents the relevant policy and guidance;
- Section 4 identifies and explains the significance of any relevant designated and non-designated heritage assets;
- Section 5 describes any relevant impact of the proposed development; and
- Section 6 provides the recommendations and conclusion.

2 SITE CONTEXT

- 2.1.1. Birch Business Park is located to the south west of Heywood, to the north of the M62. The site is a major developed employment site within the Green Belt, accessed off Whittle Lane. The business park spans approximately 15.6 hectares, comprising a range of buildings and units in B2/B8 use classes.
- 2.1.2. The Google extract below provides a clear overview of the site, including Units B and G to the south west. The recently redeveloped Unit D is also shown to the south east.

Figure 2-1 - Site Context Map



- 2.1.3. The site is bound by Whittle Lane to the south, Moss-Hall road to the west, open fields define the sites northern and eastern boundaries. The immediate area surrounding the business park consists of farmland with a topography sloping away towards the south east.
- 2.1.4. Heywood Distribution park lies circa 900 metres to the north of the site with the boundary of the recently approved South Heywood development lying approximately 350 metres to the east. As such, despite the existing rural surroundings, the wider character of the site will be transformed by development and built form in the coming years.
- 2.1.5. In terms of the application site itself, Units B and G are located to the south west of Birch Business Park. Unit B currently comprises 3,791m² of floorspace with Unit G extending to 726m². Both units feature hard standing for car and HGV parking. Landscaped areas are present along the sites southern and western boundaries which partially screen the development from surrounding public vantage points.
- 2.1.6. Access into the business park is currently taken off Whittle Lane with a series of internal roads providing access to each individual unit.
- 2.1.7. Birch Business Park has undergone significant investment over the last 10 years to modernise the business park and individual units, most of which were erected in the 1940's. The site is currently made up of units ranging in size from 366m² (3,935 sqft) to 6,947m² (74,780 sqft), with a range of

building heights from 3.8m to 14.8m to ridge. This range of unit sizes provides premises for businesses ranging from distribution to manufacturing. Units B and G are the remaining buildings to be redeveloped and modernised.

- 2.1.8. In terms of transport links, the site benefits from being in close proximity to the M60, M62 and M66 providing quick and easy access Greater Manchester and beyond.
- 2.1.9. In terms of designations the site falls within Flood Zone 1. The site lies 1.1 km from Birch conservation area and is 1.19 km from Lower Whittle Farm which is designated as a heritage asset
- 2.1.10. The site is directly adjacent to a non-designated heritage asset at Broom hill Farm.

3 LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 3.1.1. The HIA has been prepared in accordance with all relevant national and local legislation, policy and guidance. This section of the HIA provides details of the legislation, policy and guidance which has been considered as part of this assessment.

PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) ACT 1990

- 3.1.2. The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides specific protection for buildings, structures and areas of special historic architectural or historic interest. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 both require that applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 3.1.3. The above legislation is relevant as the proposal has the potential to impact upon a nearby non-designated heritage asset. The potential impact must be identified and assessed against all relevant policy.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

National planning policy framework (NPPF) (2021)

- 3.1.4. Section 16 (paragraphs 189 – 208) of the NPPF are specific to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. In determining applications, the NPPF advises that local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 3.1.5. Paragraph 195 states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

Planning Policy Guidance

- 3.1.6. The Planning Practice Guidance (the PPG) sits alongside the NPPF and includes further guidance.
- 3.1.7. The PPG clarifies that being able to properly assess the nature, extent and the importance of the significance of the heritage asset and the contribution of its setting, is very important to understanding the potential impact and acceptability of development proposals.

LOCAL POLICY

The Core Strategy

- 3.1.8. The adopted Development Plan for the area comprises the Rochdale Core Strategy and Saved Policies of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

- 3.1.9. Policy P2 – Protecting and enhancing character, landscape, and heritage seek to conserve, enhance, and protect key heritage assets, both statutory and non-statutory, including consideration of their wider settings

OTHER MATERIAL GUIDANCE

Historic England guidance

- 3.1.10. Historic England provides guidance relating more generally to the protection of the historic environment in England. The most pertinent guidance relevant to these proposals is:
- 3.1.11. Conservation Principles: Policy and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment, published in 2008. This document provides explanation of setting and significance, notably stating in paragraph 76 that: “Setting’ is an established concept that relates to the surroundings in which a place is experienced, its local context, embracing present and past relationships to the adjacent landscape. Definition of the setting of a significant place will normally be guided by the extent to which material change within it could affect (enhance or diminish) the place’s significance.” Significance is explained to relate to evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal matters.
- 3.1.12. Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment, published in 2015. This note provides further information explaining significance and setting, including guidance relating to circumstances where significance has previously been affected by changes to setting.
- 3.1.13. Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets, published 2015 and revised 2017. This note sets out the recommended approach for decision taking, describing five steps which should be followed:
- Step 1: Identify which heritage assets will be affected and their setting;
 - Step 2: Assess the degree to which setting makes a contribution to significance;
 - Step 3: Assess whether the proposed development will have a beneficial or harmful impact on significance;
 - Step 4: Explore ways to maximise enhancement and minimise harm; and,
 - Step 5: Monitor and record outcomes.

4 IDENTIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 4.1.1. The NPPF states in paragraph 189 that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. In accordance with paragraph 194 of the NPPF, this section of the HIA provides a description of the significance of the identified assets, including the contribution of setting, with a level of detail proportionate to the importance of the assets. Paragraph 194 of the NPPF clarifies that this assessment should be *“no more detailed than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on significance.”*
- 4.1.2. The NPPG provides guidance in paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 18a-007-20190723 that *“Heritage assets may be affected by direct physical change or by change in their setting. Being able to properly assess the nature, extent and importance of the significance of a heritage asset, and the contribution of its setting, is very important to understanding the potential impact and acceptability of development proposals.”*
- 4.1.3. The proposed development is considered to have the potential to impact on two designated heritage assets, namely, Birch Conservation Area and Lower Whittle Farm, and one non-designated heritage asset, Broom Hill Farm.
- 4.1.4. The proposal is for the demolition of existing units B and G and erection of a B2/B8 warehouse unit with ancillary Class E (Formally B1(a) office) space at Birch Business Park including ancillary office, parking and servicing areas, associated works and infrastructure
- 4.1.5. Therefore, this assessment has been carried out to assess heritage assets in the surrounding area.

4.2 DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

Birch Conservation Area

- 4.2.1. Birch Conservation Area is an ecclesiastical parish formed from Bury and Middleton parishes. Located approximately 2 miles north-west of Middleton, the small town developed along the line of Whittle Brook and the key route from Middleton to Heywood (now Heywood Old Road). Built in 1829, the Church of St Mary (vicarage to the south-east) formed one of the early foci for the development of the village.
- 4.2.2. The Birch Village Conservation Area Appraisal 2013 sets out that character of the area is largely a result of its expansion from the early 19th century between the two key points of the Church of St Mary (now demolished) and Birch Mill, and the domestic architectural designs of influential architect Edgar Wood.
- 4.2.3. The special architectural and historic interest of the Birch Conservation Area lies predominantly in its distinctive townscape (formed along the line of Heywood Old Road) as well as its association with notable architect, Edgar Wood.
- 4.2.4. The character of the Conservation Area therefore lies in the linear, road orientated form of the townscape and the quality of the architecture along its length.
- 4.2.5. This special interest can be summarised as follows;
- Strong association with influential architect, Edgar Wood (including the Grade II listed Birch Drinking Fountain)

- The close historic and spatial relationship between the architecture of the village and Heywood Old Road, creating a linear townscape;
- The characteristic combination of early 19th century industrial architecture and late 19th century high quality Arts and Crafts style residences; and
- Distinctive local architectural detail - such as stylised gable ends, decorative roof ridges, flower-motif terracotta tilework and projecting bay windows.

Lower Whittle Farm

- 4.2.6. Lower Whittle Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building with an associated farm complex. The farmhouse dates to the 17th century and comprises a timber-framed structure, which underwent substantial rebuilding in the 18th century. The farmhouse contains brick noggin and wattle and daub within the panels of the house, which are roughly square. The original posts are diagonally braced and support diagonally braced tie-beam roof trusses, which are original to the structure. Within the farmhouse is a 19th century staircase.
- 4.2.7. Lower Whittle Farmhouse draws its significance predominantly from its architectural/aesthetic value, both design and fortuitous, as well as possessing illustrative historic value.
- 4.2.8. It should be noted that only the Farmhouse is listed.

NON DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

Broom Hill Farm

- 4.2.9. Broom Hill Farm consists of a late 18th century brick-built probable granary and threshing barn arranged on an L shaped plan. The threshing barn has ventilation holes on the eastern gable wall as well as a cart entrance. A long range of buildings to the immediate west appear to be predominantly late 19th century in date and consist of a farmhouse, attached labourer cottages and single storey cowhouses. The rest of the complex appears to be later 20th century in date and of little historic significance. Broom Hill Farm is an organically developed farm complex.
- 4.2.10. The farm sits within a gently undulating agricultural landscape and there are wide ranging views to the west and east.



Figure 4-1. 3D model showing Broom Hill Farm. Source: Google Earth View, July 2019.



Figure 4-2 . Site Entrance to Broom Hill Farm Source: Google Street View.

5 IMPACT ON SIGNIFICANCE

- 5.1.1. As per the requirements of Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects the setting of a listed building, the Local Authority must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting, or any features of special architectural interest which it possesses.
- 5.1.2. The NPPF explains that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of heritage assets, or through development within the setting of heritage assets. Any harm or loss can only be justified through clear and convincing justification.

PROPOSALS

- 5.1.3. The proposed development comprises of the demolition of existing units B and G and erection of a B2/B8 warehouse unit with ancillary Class E (Formally B1(a) office) space at Birch Business Park including ancillary office, parking and servicing areas, associated works and infrastructure
- 5.1.4. The building will have a maximum height of 12m to underside of haunch with a maximum apex height of 15.1m. The unit would measure 128m by 60m.
- 5.1.5. The proposals reflect contemporary design principles in creating a high-quality warehouse/industrial building.
- 5.1.6. The elevational treatment of the warehouse has been designed to provide a robust high quality design utilising a contrasting colour palette to break down the elevations and soften the appearance of the building.
- 5.1.7. Much of the building will be clad in vertical trapezoidal profiled cladding finished in Goose Wing Grey. The façade of the units will be broken up with profiled cladding and dark blue banding on certain elevations.
- 5.1.8. Given the nature of the development and its location within a longstanding industrial/employment park lying within the green belt, landscaping is considered a key element to the proposals. A comprehensive landscape strategy has been prepared.
- 5.1.9. The landscape strategy strengthens the sites southern and western boundaries with additional tree and hedgerow planting. The strategy ensures that the building itself will be well screened from key views such as Moss Hall Road.
- 5.1.10. The landscape strategy and proposed mitigation ensures that this boundary is enhanced, and the building suitably screened. As the landscape develops and matures it will help to assimilate the proposed development into its immediate site and surroundings, providing a high level of screening.
- 5.1.11. The proposed layout provides the most direct pedestrian route from the footpath into the development site/building and avoids the need for the crossing of access roads and HGV routes.
- 5.1.12. In terms of parking provision, the proposal includes, 7 trailer park spaces and 89 car parking spaces including 5 disabled bays in addition to secure cycle storage for 12 spaces

- 5.1.13. The submission drawings prepared by Fletcher-Rat Architects provide full detail of the proposals, including site plans, elevations and street scenes.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT ON SIGNIFICANCE

- 5.1.14. The NPPG explains that impact on significance is understood by assessing the degree of harm to significance rather than the scale of proposed development.
- 5.1.15. As set out in Chapter 4 of this report, the surrounding area contains two designated and one non-designated heritage assets which has potential to be impacted by the proposal. It is considered that the assessment in Chapter 4 of this report accurately defines the significance of all relevant heritage assets.

Designated Heritage Assets

Birch Conservation Area

- 5.1.16. The northwestern boundary of the Conservation Area is located approximately 850 metres away from the application site. As a result, the application site is a considerable distance away from the heritage asset itself.
- 5.1.17. In addition to the separation distance, regard must also be had to the various physical and natural features which separate the application site from the heritage asset. The M62 and Birch services provides a significant physical and visual barrier, hindering any views to the asset.
- 5.1.18. Furthermore, there are areas of mature landscaping between the application site and asset, which further screen views to the heritage asset. As a result, there is no visual connection between the site and heritage asset when viewed from either the application site, Whittle Lane or from the heritage asset itself.
- 5.1.19. In this respect, the proposal will not have any impact on the setting of the heritage asset.

Lower Whittle Farm

- 5.1.20. The eastern boundary of the application site is approximately 870 metres away from Lower Whittle Farmhouse. As a result, the application is a considerable distance away from the heritage asset.
- 5.1.21. It should be noted that any direct views from the Farmhouse to Birch business Park are obscured by a variety of industrial/agricultural/commercial buildings which surround the Farmhouse, detracting from its setting.
- 5.1.22. As with Birch Conservation Area, there are numerous physical and natural features which separate the application site from the Farmhouse, evidenced by the snip below from Dr Fold Lane. This view shows the significant level of natural landscape which screens Birch Business Park.
- 5.1.23. There is no connection between the site and the heritage asset when viewed from the application site or the heritage asset.
- 5.1.24. In any event, the recently completed Unit D a Birch Business Park is closer to the Farmhouse than the application proposals, circa 700 metres. Unit D completely obscures any visual relationship between the proposal and the asset. It is also noteworthy that during the determination of Unit D (20/00955/FUL) no heritage concerns were raised.

- 5.1.25. In light of the above, the proposed development will not directly or indirectly harm the identified assets or its setting, whether by virtue of visual or physical impacts.



Figure 5-1 – Views from Dr Fold Lan towards Birch Business Park

Non-Designated Heritage Assets

Broom Hill Farm

- 5.1.26. Broom Hill Farm is located to the southwest of the application site, adjacent to Whittle Lane.
- 5.1.27. It is important to note that there are a number of buildings and structures associated with the site, however, it is only the range of farm buildings and farmhouse to the west which are of significance and considered to be a non-designated heritage asset. The rest of the complex appears to be later 20th century in date and of little historic significance.
- 5.1.28. The buildings of interest, including the Farmhouse are located the furthest away from the application site, approximately 60 metres. The Farmhouse outlook is predominantly focussed to the south and west, overlooking open fields. This has been confirmed during a site visit. The farmhouse does not orientate towards the application site.
- 5.1.29. Furthermore, the more recent farm/agriculture buildings partially screen the buildings of significance from the business park.
- 5.1.30. It must be acknowledged that whilst the proposal would be closer to the Broom Hill Farm, the setting of the Farm is already experienced in the context of a modern industrial estate. Importantly Birch Business Park only forms part of the Farmhouse's setting to the north, open fields define the Farmhouses eastern, western and southern boundary and therefore any encroachment by the proposal would only impact on a very limited part of the Farmhouse's setting.
- 5.1.31. Despite the lack of visual and physical relationship, it is important to the note that the application is accompanied by a comprehensive landscape strategy which seeks to strengthen the sites western and southern boundaries. New buffer hedgerow and tree planting is proposed which will screen the majority of the proposal.
- 5.1.32. This landscaping will mitigate the majority of any increase in height and scale.
- 5.1.33. In light of the above, given that the Farm is already well screened by other buildings within its own complex, that Birch Business Park only forms a minor part of its setting to the north and that the application is supported by a comprehensive landscaping strategy, the proposals only cause a very low level of harm to the setting of the asset.

- 5.1.34. It is important to flag that the Council's conservation comments suggest that the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the non-designated heritage asset and that this forms a material consideration which should be accounted for in the planning balance.
- 5.1.35. This stance is incorrect. The NPPF is clear at paragraph 202 that less than substantial harm can only apply to **designated** heritage assets. Broom Hill Farm is non-designated and therefore this test of harm does not apply.
- 5.1.36. Instead, paragraph 203 sets out that;
- 'The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset'.*
- 5.1.37. As such, following a balanced judgment, it is considered a very low level of harm would be caused to the asset.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1.1. In accordance with Paragraphs 194 of the NPPF, this HIA has assessed the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets in the local area. An assessment has been undertaken of the potential effects of the proposed development on these assets.
- 6.1.2. This HIA demonstrates that the effects of the proposed development would cause no harm to the significance or setting of either Lower Whittle Farm or the Birch Conservation Area.
- 6.1.3. Para 203 states that *'the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset'*.
- 6.1.4. A very low level of harm has been identified to Broom Hill Farm, a non-designated heritage asset. This harm should be weighed in the planning balance, carrying very limited weight.
- 6.1.5. The overall benefits of the scheme mainly, significant economic benefits and local employment clearly outweigh this harm.
- 6.1.6. The proposed development therefore accords with the relevant policies of the NPPF and Development Plan.



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