

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF WARWICK MILL AND LONDON HOUSE

MIDDLETON M24 1AZ

WARWICK MILL – SCHEME DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

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Contents

- 1.0 Introduction**
- 2.0 Planning Overview**
- 3.0 Approved Redrow Housing Scheme, 2007**
- 4.0 Alternative Uses**
- 5.0 Recent Housing Proposals 2020**
- 6.0 Oldham Mill Strategy 2021**
- 7.0 Feasibility Study**
- 8.0 The Brief**
- 9.0 Conclusion**
- 10.0 Appendices**

Alternative Schemes/Review of Options

1.0 Introduction

The current applications for the listed site are for the conversion of a redundant listed mill and associated outbuildings to residential and mixed use facilities.

This Statement relates to the research carried out in determining a viable use of the Listed Mill Building, and its design development.

Whilst many Mills have been repurposed in the North West, there are a great number that remain underused or vacant. Their reuse offers the opportunity to make a major contribution to economic growth, by creating jobs, housing businesses and accommodating new homes. Mill Buildings form an important part of the nation's industrial heritage.

However, there is evidence that Mill development projects need assistance to overcome market failures created by high abnormal costs and restrictions in the developer/funder sector.

In reviewing repurposing options, studies previously carried in the North West were reviewed, including case studies. These studies included;

- Driving Growth through Repurposing Mills
- Engines of Prosperity – New Uses for Old Mills – North West
- Oldham Mill Strategy
- Heritage Textile Mills of Greater Manchester

This Statement should be read in conjunction with the Warwick Mill Building Fabric Alterations

2.0 Planning Overview

This site is part of Middleton Town Centre Masterplan and clearly identified as a residential site to meet the regeneration objectives of the town.

Recent planning history includes;

1988 – Use of third floor of the Mill for sports and leisure centre (approved)

1997 – Change of use for the building to a factory outlet centre with ancillary food and drink outlets (approved)

2007 – Change of use for 147 apartments and associated parking (approved)

2015 – Change of use for show rooms along with ancillary uses (approved)

In 2009, Millerbrook properties were in talks with Rochdale Development Agency over a housing led mixed use development of Warwick Mill having paid £1.85 Million to Redrow housing.

The proposal was to include a business centre, residential and retail however market conditions were challenging at the time and no further matters were progressed by this company in terms of any formal submissions.

In 2020, J&K Group were in discussions with Rochdale Borough Council for a residential led scheme with commercial elements following their detailed review of comparable schemes in the outer Manchester areas, and other cities. This included dropping the core of the building to create a central courtyard to give light and air to the residential units around the perimeter of the site.

3.0 Approved Redrow Homes (Lancs) Ltd Scheme April 2007

The scheme proposed by Redrow Homes was a full application scheme based on detailed research into the reuse of Warwick Mill as to the potential use of the building and its viability.

The design and detail of the proposed development was considered very carefully following detailed survey and archaeological assessment as agreed with Rochdale Borough Council and a preliminary structural report. The scheme was worked out having due regard to that information and in consultation with Council Officers and English Heritage. It was subject to further refinement and revision following post submission discussions with Planning and Conservation Officers of Rochdale Borough Council.

The applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent were for the conversion of the Mill to a 147 apartment developments being submitted to the RBC in January 2006 but consequently withdrawn following discussions with the Planning and Conservation Officers. The design featured 3 smaller lightwells to the central part of the building however, the RBC during the planning process determined that a single light lightwell was more appropriate to the scheme and formed the basis of the revised application. The final applications were supported by a suite of reports relating to Transport, Flood Risk, Archaeological Survey, Structural Survey, and included a Detailed Design and Access Statement, and Supporting Statement.

It was noted that the scheme included a single void through the building from first floor level to roof to create a lightwell within the central core of the building, and the insertion of a large feature stairway to all upper levels in this central core. It was stated in the application that as a consequence of the creation of the lightwell, 32 structural columns will be removed (8 on each floor) with part of the structural framework (tie beams) and the barrel vaulted ceiling and floor within the void. Additionally, stripping of all floors to enable reinforcement beams to be inserted to compensate for the loss of the internal structure within the voids, and replacement of a light weight concrete screed and acoustic floor.

At the time, it was also established that there was no justifiable policy objection to the loss of the building for employment use and all policies were reviewed current at the time, as to whether residential development of this site is acceptable in principle.

It was also established in planning policy terms, that the proposed development for use as residential accommodation was acceptable provided that it preserved the listed building, the scheme of conversion was sympathetic to the original building and protects features that are of particular architectural or historic interest, and does not conflict with any other policies in the Adopted Development Plan.

The application documentation relating to the Design and Access Statement and Supporting Statement further stated that the proposed works and alterations to the building demonstrates that they will minimise the overall impact of the special character and features of the building and the development proposals are consistent with relevant planning policies and guidance in this respect. It further states that the application proposes a long term economically viable use of the Mill which will ensure that it is preserved for many years and that the proposed conversion to residential use is the only realistic option to a building of this scale and nature.

With reference to the proposed development, the most noteworthy alteration to the listed building was the proposals to create a light well through the central core of the Mill. This was necessary to allow light to penetrate, lighting to the heart of the building, improving natural light and ventilation to the individual apartments and making the central part of the Mill a successful and useable communal area. The central core of the Mill being a space 21m x 65m was unsuitable for use within the residential apartments as it is too deep for natural light to penetrate to provide an acceptable living environment. The walkway was designed around the lightwell at each level which was open to the atrium with the walkways providing views into and across the void space. The Design and Access Statement associated with the application concluded the following;

“This statement demonstrates that the new lightwell is necessary to secure a satisfactory conversion of the Mill for residential purposes and that this is the only viable use to secure the long term future of the listed building. The lightwell has been designed in consultation with Planning and Conservation Officers of the RBC to minimise external and internal impact to the historic fabric of the building. In particular, it ensures the retention and exposure of a significant part of the original steel column and brick jack arch structure of the Mill as a feature in the communal area”.

The supporting statements (Design and Access Statement + Supporting Statement) relating to this application is appended under Appendix 1.0 and 2.0.

4.0 Alternative Uses

In 2015 a change of use for showrooms with ancillary uses for Warwick Mill and the adjoining London House redevelopment was submitted.

The brief for the planning application was based on a primary use of the proposed development as a trade showroom for predominantly, but not exclusively, Chinese manufacturers of household and construction related products in a 'shop window' for the UK and wider European markets. The Greater Manchester area was seen as an excellent springboard for Chinese export growth.

There was a feasibility study undertaken at the end of 2014 establishing that the most efficient way of developing the building and adjoining London House site for the proposed uses was to demolish London House and redevelop the site as a more integrated extension of Warwick Mill. It was stated at the time, a number of options to add floors to Warwick Mill was also explored including the addition of residential accommodation.

It was stated in reports that in the end that the preferred scheme omitted all residential floor area for commercial reason and the client was keen to find uses for the extensive area of flat roof that existed and was envisaged as a potential external show area for garden related products.

The proposals for the upper four floors of Warwick Mill were given over to trade show room spaces with generally open plan setting with a new vertical circulation core added to the existing routes to provide adequate means of escape and lifts. Other new openings allowed for the introduction of escalator stacks serving all floors and a new service core to the building.

The application argued that the existing building was big enough and visually powerful enough to enable to accommodate some quite bold building interventions without undermining the integrity of the whole, and that those interventions should be clearly contemporary and should probably counterpoint the heavy dark masonry of the Mill with visually lighter and materials. It also stated that the proposed use of the new development should serve to open the character of the internal structure and open spaces.

The supporting Planning Statement associated with the proposal was prepared after 12 months of liaison with Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale Development Agency Officers, a Pre Application consultation with Rochdale Borough Council and presentations to members of the Middleton Township Committee.

It was noted that the RBC Pre-Application Report dated 10th July 2015 stated 'I note that the proposals involve interventions to features of the building of high significance, as identified in the Statement of Significance. As noted by Historic England the intervention to Warwick Mill will require convincing justification. The circulation core proposed within Warwick Mill would result in the loss of the cast iron columns. It is suggested that the main entrance and circulation space may be better located within the new building to provide an attractive frontage and public realm to minimise interventions to Warwick Mill. I consider it essential that a detailed report of the structural works proposed is submitted to demonstrate that the interventions will not undermine the structural integrity of Warwick Mill'.

Unfortunately trading opportunities between the East and West, lessened over the post application years, rendering the proposed use unviable and that the location of such a defined specialist market was possibly in an area that was not suitable for international trade.

The proposed use at the time was similar to that relating to the application in 1997 for the change of use for the building to a factory outlet centre with ancillary food and drink outlets.

This was a 'fashion at the time' in developments for out of town shopping in terms of creating centralised outlets for known brands or, 'destination shopping.'

However the fashion for this type of outlet had receded and was only successful in areas close to transportation ports such as Chatham Docks area or central locations with good transport routes such was Bicester Village

5.0 Recent Housing Proposals, 2020

The J & K Group carried out an initial review of Warwick Mill in that it offered an existing opportunity to create a landmark development and beacon of regeneration to the local area following their study and investigations of numerous comparable schemes in the areas of outer Manchester and other major UK Cities to create a suggested business plan and direction for the development.

Their Executive Summary stated that “we have determined that dropping the core of the building to create a central courtyard is the best way to give light and air to the residential unit around the perimeter of the site (building), whilst providing the most effective way of delivering this scheme.”

The report went on to state that the development of circa 200 residential units could be provided and this would almost certain to attract commercial interest (in the Town Centre).

The Statement further stated that the current pandemic is creating decentralisation with companies and professionals looking to move out of the city centres and into cheaper accessible satellite areas. Working from home was becoming the new norm but not always practical so flexible co-working areas have seen an increase in demands.

The Statement went on to examine several comparable developments such as Elisabeth Garden in Reddish. Elisabeth Gardens is also a converted Mill which had been transformed into apartments and houses with brand new penthouses on an additional floor of the Mill. At the time that the development reached practical completion three months previous, and was 90% sold out.

The appraisal by J&K group did not eventuate in terms of a planning application due in fact to the ongoing pandemic.

6.0 Oldham Mill Strategy 2021

Prior to developing the current scheme at Warwick Mill for residential use, a review of the Oldham Mill Strategy 2021 was carried out. Chapter 6 of this Study was devoted to 'Housing Potential'. (Appendix 3.0)

The Strategy was based on the repurposing of existing textile Mill stock across Oldham having potential to play an important part of the delivery of new homes and jobs across the Borough. However, it acknowledged that “many of the remaining mills are located within weaker market areas where capital values are lower and the number of Mills, particularly those that are fallen into a state of disrepair will be subject to significant cost reduction. In order to formulate a strategy to secure the sustainable future of existing Mill stock, it is crucial to understand the viability issues that may affect the repurposing of the existing Mill buildings to deliver new homes to meet the Council’s housing targets in the area to 2037”.

The Strategy was focused on delivery of new housing through the conversion or, where appropriate redevelopment of Mill sites.

The Strategy stated under the heading Low Gross to Net Ratio ‘many conversions due to the large footplate of the mills themselves would require creation of a central atrium within the building to provide outlook, circulation space, daylight into the units. In addition, due to the fact that many Mills have limited curtilage, ground floor areas are often need to be given over to parking areas to bikes and communal areas. As a result the gross to net ratio is reduced compared to a use that can maximise the whole floor plate.’

The Strategy under this Section also provides an illustration of conversion showing a large atrium that is being cut into the original Mill to accommodate residential development.

Reference is also made to number of units under Section 6.53 which states ‘the good practice example of Historic England Report at Cotton Works, Bolton suggest an average unit size of 70sq m but we believe that this is being calculated by dividing the gross area by the number of units delivered and fails to take into account of circulation, communal spaces, etc. We have therefore adopted a blended size of 1 and 2 bedroom units based on the national minimum space standards of 55sq m per apartment. This assumes a 50/50 split of 1 and 2 bed and whilst this is a fairly crude approach, it is nonetheless provides a reasonable high level of likely capacity”.

This Oldham Mill Strategy 2021 constituted an important element in considering an appropriate use for the current repurposing of Warwick Mill.

7.0 Feasibility Study

Based on the detailed planning research on the history of the site and reviews of conversions of Mills in the Manchester/Oldham area, a Feasibility Study was progressed prior to developing initial design schemes and the Development Brief.

The feasibility study that was carried out is fully referenced in the Design and Access Statement in July 2023 and an extract of this study is replicated on the below.

8.0 The Brief

Further to the Feasibility Study and reviewing the demographics of the site, the development consultant team worked with the Client, and from the conclusions of the Feasibility Study that the primary use for the proposed development was for a residential mixed use scheme, retaining and restoring the Mill building, and replacing London House with a new build development (the Loom).

The Design Criteria listed the following aims of the redevelopment/repurposing of the Mill and the adjoining site. These are listed as below;

- Respect the quality and history of Warwick Mill building
- Respect the town centre gateway of the site's location
- Minimise alterations to the Mill Building façade, whilst creating an environment compliant with current regulations
- Restore the existing facades of the Mill
- Maintain the existing cast iron frame, load bearing brick facades and expose these elements where possible internally
- Create a mix of apartments relevant to the locality and demographics and employment status of future residents to the area.
- Apartments to comply with NDSS standards on room sizes
- Maximise daylight to the apartments within the Mill Building due to deep plan existing building form
- Provide two forms of building (old and new) that contrast but compliment
- Create a sustainable environment throughout the total development
- Respect the biodiversity of the site, particularly to the Wince Book frontage
- Compliance with relevant local and national development plans
- Support the recommendations of the Middleton Town Centre Spatial Masterplan
- Create a mixed use development, of residential led, commercial and leisure spaces
- Improve and provide public access to the site
- Consider traffic movement associated with the scheme
- Restore and reuse existing secondary buildings for bars and restaurants use.
- Provide publicly accessible outdoor areas linked to the Wince Brook
- Create residential landscaped areas for all ages at various locations throughout the development

- Create direct interaction with the main town centre by inclusions of bars/restaurants/ function areas
- Compliment town centre activities, and not compete
- Create a viable scheme

9.0 Conclusions

The applications are for the conversion of a practically redundant listed Mill and associated outbuildings to residential use. The proposed development is acceptable in principle and in accordance with planning policies at all levels for the economy in the use of land and buildings for new residential development, particularly in inner urban locations.

- The Mill is no longer suitable for continued employment use;
- The development will result in the long term viable use of a protected listed building;
- Mills with deep floor plates require innovative design solutions in order to ensure the availability of natural light and ventilation to all rooms.
- The scheme is entirely consistent with the council's wider regeneration initiatives for Middleton Town Centre as set out in the Middleton Town Centre Spatial Masterplan.
- The scheme is also consistent with national and local planning policies for the protection of listed buildings, since the proposed works of conversion will preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the building.

Appendices

1.0 Redrow Design and Access Statement 2007

2.0 Redrow Supporting Statement 2007

3.0 Oldham Mill Strategy 2021 (Chapter 6 extract)

4.0 GMAA Design And Access Statement 2023