

Design and Access Statement to Accompany
the Planning Application at Rakewood Higher Mill

Introduction and Heritage Statement

Rakewood is a hamlet located to the south of Hollingworth Lake and close to the population densities of Smithy Bridge, Littleborough and Rochdale.

Rakewood Higher Mill has been in the same family over 150 years evolving with the changing times of the textile industry from late Victorian to present day.

The site is within the Rakewood Conservation Area and although the mill is not listed it is recorded on the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record (GM-HER Ref. 5299.1.0). It dates back to the early 1800's and is unique as out of 110 textile finishing sites identified across Rochdale, all have now been lost to development.

In the eighteenth century Rochdale was predominantly a woollen manufacturing area. Throughout the century this was changing from a domestic occupation carried as an adjunct to farming to a factory based industry. The finishing processes; in the case of wool, scouring, fulling, raising and dyeing were amongst the first to be industrialised and numerous mills were established alongside fast flowing streams in valleys such as Longden End Brook.

The site is particularly important as an example of the archaeology of industrialisation. It covers the period when the textile industry was moving from domestic manufacture to large scale industrialisation. It shows in its buildings and its social history the evolution of textile finishing from the water driven fulling of wool, to tenting, sulphur bleaching and blueing. Cotton finishing processes of dyeing and raising were also carried out at the site.

Planning Proposal

Whilst part of the mill is still in use today in a textile capacity, the British textile industry is in decline and it has been recognised that in order to protect such heritage assets new uses should be sought and revenue streams harnessed. (*Historic England; Mills of the North*)

The applicant wishes to re-purpose part of the redundant mill building and to create an indoor sports space and associated waiting area.

The sport space will be located on the first floor, whilst the waiting area will be located below on the ground floor. The sport space will be accessed via a new external metal staircase leading up from the parking area to a new entrance created by the enlargement of a current extractor fan opening. The ground floor waiting area will be accessed by a new door opening directly below the upstairs door, created by the enlarging of the current window opening.

This new space will have a specific sports flooring and be available for groups, teams, individuals and coaches to hire out for delivery of sports training/coaching and also the provision of fitness/wellbeing classes. It will be a flexible, simple space to enable a variety of sports.

The applicant has identified a need for the provision of this type of development whilst travelling extensively to support his own children in their sporting activities and through discussions with sport training providers, coaches and other parents. It has come to their attention that whilst a large amount of community spaces exist within the local area there are very few places which offer specific sport spaces where indoor training can be undertaken. With the current venues already being over-subscribed, many smaller teams/clubs/groups, have to simply go without the ability to meet/train indoors, especially over the Autumn/Winter months. This can be detrimental both to the groups and indeed the individuals within them and it is hoped that this new sport space can help alleviate this issue.

It is envisaged that the space will be used by sports, fitness and well-being groups during the week days along with 1 to 1 training providers. During the out of school/work hours (evenings and weekends) the space will be used by groups/teams for training and again by 1 to 1 providers.

No material change will be made to the exterior of the existing fabric of the mill building, except for the provision of a new external metal staircase to provide access to the first floor and new entrance doors to both floors.

The provision of this facility fits with the other uses of the site and indeed the existing outdoor sports venue in the village. It is hoped the sports space will be seen as a welcome addition to the local area and help with the focus, both locally and nationally, on assisting people of all ages to participate in fitness and sporting activities. Another positive by-product of the space is that it will provide regeneration and support for the rest of the Rakewood Mill site to help to ensure its longevity and protection going forwards.

The site can be accessed by car as well as sustainably by cycle or on foot and has off road parking capacity.

Design

The change in use of the space will require no external alteration to the fabric of the existing building. The addition of a staircase will create a visual impact to the side of the building, however this will be mitigated to some extent by the present construction of the building with a brick extension to the side. It can be seen that there is an old ventilation unit inserted in a disused window with an additional window on the ground floor.

This site lies within the Rakewood Conservation Area and although there will be an addition of an external staircase to the building it has been considered that overall this will not negatively impact the area but will instead provide a positive outcome for the wider community and protect the existing heritage.



Photo 1. shows the existing condition of the staircase location.

In order to incorporate the staircase into the building the existing window cills will be utilised as the doorstep on each new access and the new doorways will be constructed using the same aged 3" Accrington Brick. This will then ensure an aesthetic fit with existing materials and design.

The staircase will have non-slip metal treads and the access doors will be safety standard compliant fire doors.

There will be external LED lighting to provide lighting on the staircase and at the access doors which will be of a style to fit with the historical value of the site and will only be used when the facility is in use.

This library image demonstrates the design of the staircase:



Access

The site is reached by travelling 1 mile south-east along Rakewood Road from the junction with Hollingworth Road adjacent to Hollingworth Lake.

Rakewood Road is a single-carriage way road heading south from the junction with Syke Road with designated passing places and several wider sections which permit vehicles to pass.

All visiting vehicles will access the site via Rakewood Road and the onsite access road which leads from the south to the east of the mill complex and park in the existing car parking adjacent to the building.

It is envisaged that the space is booked privately for sports clubs and groups with a waiting area on the ground floor. Bookings will be taken by the applicant to ensure that they are appropriate for the facility space and location.

Policy

The proposal to add a multi-sports space fits with the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. With reference to Section 6 *“Building a strong, competitive economy”* and sub-heading *“Supporting a prosperous rural economy”* it can be seen that this project is in alignment with key priorities.

Considering Para. 84, planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*

The concept of the creation of an indoor multi-use sport space has already attracted support and enquiries from several local groups who at present have no regular space available to hold their sessions.

This space will provide sports training alongside mental wellbeing and fitness classes. Since the Covid-19 pandemic mental health has risen up the health and wellbeing agenda with sport and exercise known to improve mental wellbeing plus the camaraderie and interaction with others has a positive impact too. This space will allow sports providers to engage with local community leaders to enable more participants to “have-a-go” at sports.

The revenue stream generated will be fed back into the larger site at Rakewood Higher Mill to enable further restoration and preservation of the heritage of the site.

It can also be seen that this application fits the Rochdale Borough Council Core Strategy (adopted in 2016.)

Listed under the Strategic Objectives that RBC intend to attain by 2028 it can be seen that this application fits alongside:

SO1 – To deliver a more prosperous economy

- 2. Developing the rural and visitor economies particularly in the northern Pennine fringe;*
- 5. Supporting provision of educational facilities to improve skills.*

SO2 - To create successful and healthy communities

- 6. Improving the general health and quality of peoples' lives through better access to health facilities and services, education, community and cultural facilities and open space*

SO3 - To improve design, image and quality of place

- 1. Raising design quality and promoting sustainable developments;*
- 3. Protecting and enhancing our heritage and natural assets, the special character of our towns, our countryside, open spaces, river valleys and water features.*

SO4 - To promote a greener environment

- 1. Minimising Rochdale's contribution to climate change and mitigating and adapting to its adverse effects;*
- 2. Ensuring in particular that development is energy efficient and contributes to carbon reduction;*
- 5. Maximising the value of our green open areas and countryside to provide opportunities for recreation, amenity, biodiversity and flood management;*
- 7. Ensuring no detriment to the conservation interests of European and other protected natural sites.*

Under "SP2 - The Spatial Strategy for the Borough" it reads:

"2. In the Pennine fringe, in the north of the borough, we will promote a scale of new housing, employment and commercial development appropriate to the accessibility and character of the Pennine fringe. We will focus investment, development and improvements on:

- 1. Littleborough town centre;*
- 2. Pennine gateways, river and canal corridors and reservoirs;*
- 3. Key development sites; and*
- 4. The Pennine fringe visitor and rural economy"*

SP3/P - The Strategy for Pennines states that the second of two priorities is to "Enhance the South Pennine gateway and promote tourism" and listed under this heading is a statement to "Promoting rural economic activity that supports and enhances the South Pennine gateway".

In this way the aims of this development align with the core strategies for the area going forwards.

When examining the Core Strategies in more detail it can be seen that the aims of this applicant fit with policy:

Core Strategy SO1 – To deliver a more prosperous economy;

Para E5 point 6. *“South Pennine Moors area and Littleborough town centre, where we will...”*

“...c. Promote and support development that can enhance the visitor attraction of the area covering Hollingworth Lake and Country Park, Rochdale Canal, and Littleborough town centre (identified as a Pennine fringe visitor and heritage area on the Key Diagram).”

Para E6. *“- Supporting and diversifying the rural economy”* also lists support for proposals where they:

“Improve the recreational and tourist value of the Rochdale Canal, Hollingworth Lake, the Roch Valley corridor, Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway and other strategic tourist and recreational routes and sites (Policy E5); and

- Support agriculture and other appropriate activities which help to sustain economic activity whilst maintaining and improving the appearance and rural character of the borough's countryside”

And *“c. Re-uses redundant farm buildings and mills, and derelict, underused or neglected land for new rural business activity which contribute to a sustainable low carbon economy”*

Renewable technology has already been implemented at this site too.

Core Strategy SO2 - Creating successful and healthy communities

This also contains relevant policy alignment with this application.

Para C6 – *“Improved Health and Wellbeing”* states *“We will improve people’s health and well-being and reduce health inequalities by:*

- Creating an economic, physical and social environment which promotes and supports healthy lifestyles;

Para C7 – *“Delivering education facilities - We will improve education, skills and training in the borough and raise educational achievement by... f. Promote the provision of existing and new facilities, open space and leisure uses that create interest and activity, and opportunities taken for educational and learning use”*

Para C8 – *“Improving community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities... 8.53 Improving community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities will help improve residents health and quality of life and make the borough a more desirable place to live, work and visit”*

Core Strategy SO3 – Improving design, image and quality of place”

Within this strategy P1 – *Improving image ... “We will ensure new development improves the image of the borough by: d. Promoting the development and re-use of under-used land and buildings, maximising the potential for heritage assets to provide a sense of place and image”*

It then goes on to state that heritage assets can play a significant role in reinforcing the distinctive character of the area. In this way the preservation of the mill whilst bringing it to the wider public through a sports space use creates longevity and ensures the future of the site.

P2 – *“Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage”* also states *“2. We will protect the borough's heritage by: a. Conserving, enhancing and promoting key heritage assets, both statutory and nonstatutory, including consideration of their wider settings. Key heritage assets of the borough include:*

i. Four outstanding conservation areas: Central Rochdale, Middleton and Littleborough town centres and Rock Nook / Summit;

ii. Other designated assets such as listed buildings, conservation areas, registered parks and scheduled ancient monuments;

iii. The heritage of the Co-operative movement, the Rochdale Pioneers and the Labour movement;

iv. The Edgar Wood and J. H. Sellers cultural heritage;

v. The heritage of the seventeenth and eighteenth century vernacular tradition; and

vi. The engineering heritage, including mills, canals and railways.”

And *“ c. Using heritage assets positively and intelligently to strengthen identity and image and support the visitor economy, particularly in development and regeneration schemes”*

Para 9.14 to 9.16 recognises the importance of the heritage of the textile industry and also notes that sensitive alterations may sometimes be necessary to make heritage assets more accessible. In this way the addition of the metal staircase is required to bring the building back into use. It will be a protrusion from the side of the building but will not be detrimental to the overall visual amenity of the area given the secluded location amidst other mill buildings.

Core Strategy CO4 – “Promoting a greener environment”

Para G4 -*“Protecting Green Belt”* states the importance of protecting such land. In this way this application will protect it in the locality ensuring that the fabric of the mill remains intact and it does not become dilapidated. The provision of this facility within an existing building and brownfield site also removes the need for land within the Green Belt.

Para G6 - *“Enhancing green infrastructure”* aims to improve opportunities for recreation and improve healthier lifestyles whilst protecting the natural environment. In this way this application will attract people to the area whilst providing space for health, fitness and wellbeing without any damage to the character of the landscape.

The Historic England commissioned several reports identifying the importance of reusing mill buildings. The document produced in 2017; *“Engines of Prosperity, new uses for old mills (NW)”*

looks at re-using underused space in old mills to prevent the buildings being lost. Over the years these mills have shaped the landscape and were the powerhouses behind the industrial revolution. This report identified the success with which these buildings can now be used to regenerate communities by providing public spaces in underused or redundant buildings.

This work by Historic England has been further updated in 2021 with the publication of “Driving northern growth through re-purposing of historic mills” which indicated that since 2017 there had been positive uptake in the re-purposing of these old buildings and that:

“Textile mills are fundamental to the history, culture and landscape of northern England. These distinctive, character-filled places can accommodate wonderful homes, workplaces and cultural spaces. Our historic mill buildings offer a tangible link to the past and deserve a future at the centre of local communities. These key pieces of northern culture should not only be celebrated but also used to power economic and social growth. Heritage and culture can transform places for the better, driving up business confidence and civic pride, attracting visitors to strengthen economic growth, and providing positive reasons for businesses and workers to locate in an area.”

This document goes on to state that the re-use of textile mills fulfils national and local environmental and sustainable objectives with the use of existing brownfield sites therefore reducing the development pressure on Green-belt land.

To conclude, it can be seen that this facility will enable more children and adults to have access to a facility for sport, wellbeing and to improve mental health. This change of use of an existing building will be minimal visually yet enable the applicant to create a revenue stream to help preserve the rest of the site and the historical heritage for generations going forwards.