

Heritage Statement for Planning Application for 23/00784/FUL Townley Street Middleton Rochdale

The following information concerns refurbishing a former office block of Geometric Furniture. Constructed in the late 1970s in buff and brown-coloured brick with timber infill window panels, the frontage parapet line is castellated. The proposed work is to update the premises to provide improved accommodation for the owners' Character Options and includes a new roof covering and replacement windows and door openings using an insulated cladding panel. The new cladding will allow new window openings to be formed to suit the revised internal layout. There is no extension to the existing floor area.

The office block site is not within a conservation area but is adjacent to St Michael's, a grade II listed church positioned on higher ground to the southeast. The area around the site has a mixture of both commercial and residential red brick Victorian properties with entrances directly onto the street. The church currently serves as a place of worship for the neighbouring housing. The office block is on the corner of Oldham Road and Townley Street and will utilise the existing roads and footpaths for pedestrian and vehicular access.

Historically, the railway network served this part of Middleton, as illustrated on the attached historical maps. They indicate a church in its current location predating the arrival of the railways in the 1840s. From the map extracts, we can see the arrival of the railways to the town and their eventual decline by the 1960s when the railway sidings and goods yard were removed.

The current church was constructed in 1902 in the Gothic Revival Perpendicular style and attributed to the significant Lancashire architectural firm Sharpe Austin and Paley. The statutory address of the Church of St Michael, Townley Street, was formerly listed as St Michael's and All Angels, Tonge-cum-Alkrington. The stone church, with clay roof tiles, was extended in 1926 with a side aisle and a tower in 1930; the church overlooks the area, particularly the four-face castellated tower located at the west end of the north aisle. It has four stages with diagonal buttresses with bands separating each stage.

The churchyard is retained by a red brick wall approximately 2m high with substantial stone copings. In addition, within the graveyard is a mature hedge approximately 1.2m high, providing protection from falls. The hedge runs along the Townley elevation of the churchyard and Grimshaw Lane. Between the proposed site and the access road to the churchyard is a 2m high-security open chain link fence with concrete posts and barbed wire guarding. Within the proposed application site, mature trees are screening the lower yard area of the office block, creating a more natural barrier to separate the church from the commercial activities below. Being located on higher ground, the proposed application roofline will not be changed to compete with the tower or interrupt the skyline formed by it or the church. Therefore, the proposed planning application can be considered neutral in its impact. Architecturally, the proposed functional changes to the former office block and warehousing are such that they will not compete with the Gothic Revival style of St. Michael's church; instead, they will contrast with a much more utilitarian and functional style when viewed from the junction of Oldham Road and Townley Street.

By approving this application, Planners will ensure future employment within the town and repurpose this existing office block to more energy-efficient standards.