

Heritage Statement for:

**Conversion of first floor offices into
two-bed self contained flat.**

**with alterations to upper ground floor retail area
and lower ground store/workshop & part external
rendering (side and rear walls).**

at

**836-838 Manchester Road, Castleton,
ROCHDALE OL11 2SP**

August 2021 (Rev. December 2023 & November 2024)

Prepared by **Architectural Services, Oldham, Rochdale & Tameside**

for

Mr S. Buckley

Introduction

This document is Heritage Statement prepared in support of an application by Mr Stephen Buckley for the conversion of first floor offices into two-bed self contained flat at 836-838 Manchester Road, Castleton, Rochdale. The work will also entail internal alterations to the upper ground floor retail area and lower ground store/workshop as well as part external rendering of the side and rear walls.

The application site sits in the Castleton (South) Conservation Area (CA), a heritage asset. This document relates to the heritage values inherent there and any possible impact on them arising from these proposals. When determining applications for planning consent in a conservation area, the council will seek to protect, conserve and enhance its architectural features, structures, settings, historic character and significance. Applicants are required to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected and the level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

In this case, the heritage asset benefits from the Castleton (South) Conservation Area Appraisal (CA App.) prepared in October 2012. Area appraisals are prepared in order to establish the special character of such areas, to guide development and to inform effective management plans. This is therefore the defining document guiding the assessment of the significance of the CA. In this document, therefore, information contained in the CA Appraisal will not be repeated unless necessary but will be referred to where appropriate. In this way, this document will concentrate on matters relevant to the application site.

This statement has been prepared in accordance with general guidelines set out in the English Heritage's '*Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance*' (2008, now Historic England) and responds to policies outlined in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF, 2019).

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Site Location & Description

The site lies on Manchester Road (A664) directly opposite Castleton railway station. It is the last private property on the south-west side of the road before the railway line. Drawings attached with the planning application provide a location plan for the site and this is shown below as Figure 1.

The site (shown red) is an area of 78.9 sq m and comprises two units over three floors at the rear and two fronting Manchester Road. The units are similar in size but the right hand one, closest to the railway line has a splayed elevation giving an extra, tapered area. The units form two of three retail units immediately adjacent to the Blue Pits PH.

The building was in brick under a slated roof with timber suspended intermediate and solid lower ground floors. The brickwork on all three sides was in a very poor condition with severe and dangerous bowing at the front, overlooking the public footpath, and failing fabric at the side and rear¹. Internal staircases are in stone with timber panelled walls. The two shop fronts largely hidden outside of business hours by roller shutter doors have low stall raisers, a side door with brick surrounds and a small stone pediment above. There are two internal chimney breasts rising

¹ Engineer's report to substantiate this assessment of the poor building condition is submitted with the planning application.

from the lower ground area. Aside from shopfronts, the building is remarkably featureless, the only distinguishing aspects perhaps being stone cills and window heads, front and rear.

At present, the lower ground floor of the building is used as storage, the upper ground floor as a single retail area and the top floor as offices; all are vacant. To the right, there is an area of sloping land adjacent the railway that is part of the application site.

A full description of Castleton and its historical development is provided in the CA App. Pages 9-14 include a number of

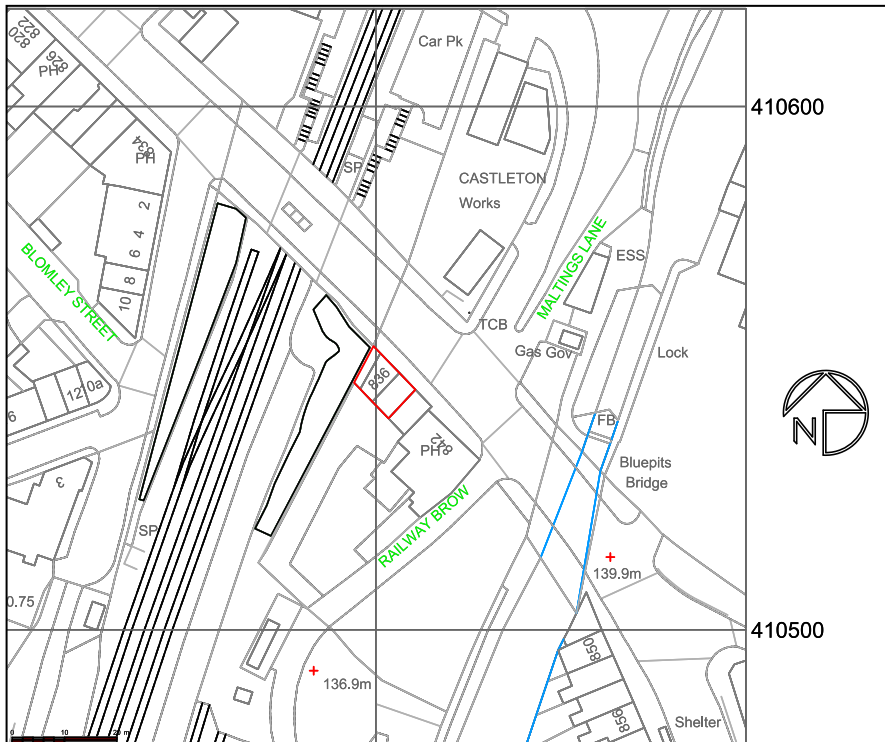


Figure 1: Plan showing application site (red). (Not to scale)

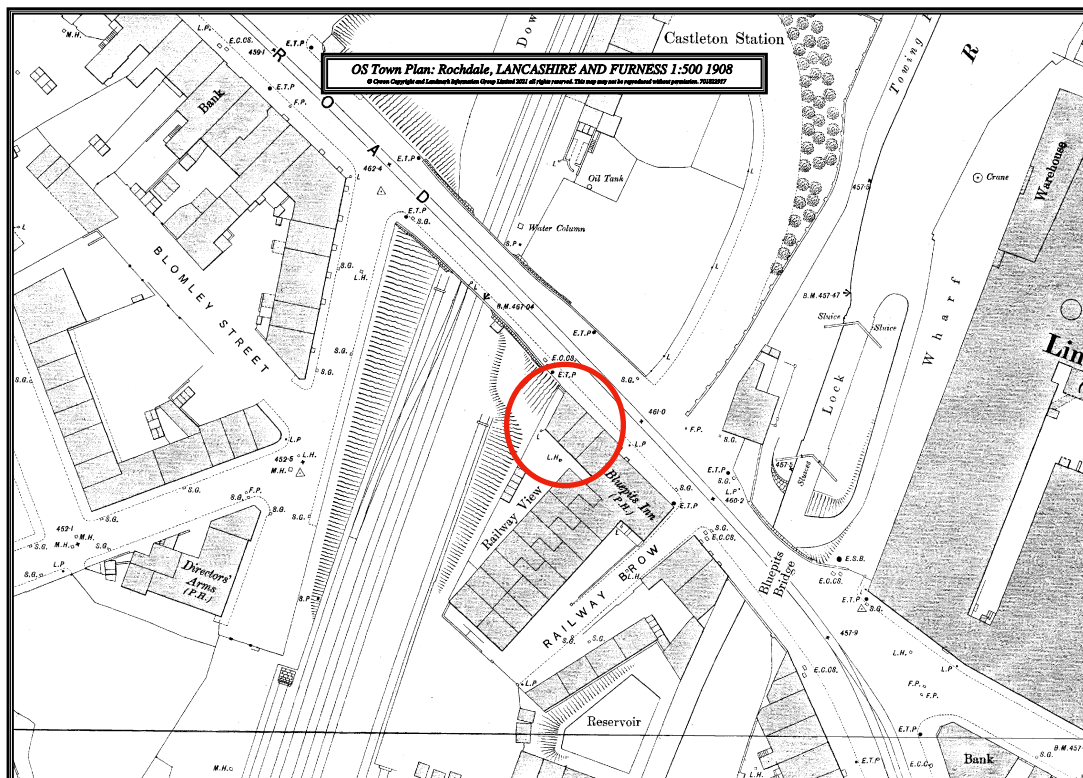


Figure 2: Historic map of 1908. showing application building in greater detail.

historic maps showing the development of the area. The application building stood on the site by 1893. A map of 1908 to a smaller scale shows the site and the two buildings (see Figure. 2).

The area is dominated by the railway line, the canal that runs roughly parallel and the A664 that cuts across both. The transport infrastructure has been defining in the development of Castleton and its character areas.

Contextual Site Assessment

The proposals site is located within the Castleton (South) Conservation Area. The CA is at least 880 m long (0.54 miles), north to south, so the extent of the entire area is difficult to show in detail.

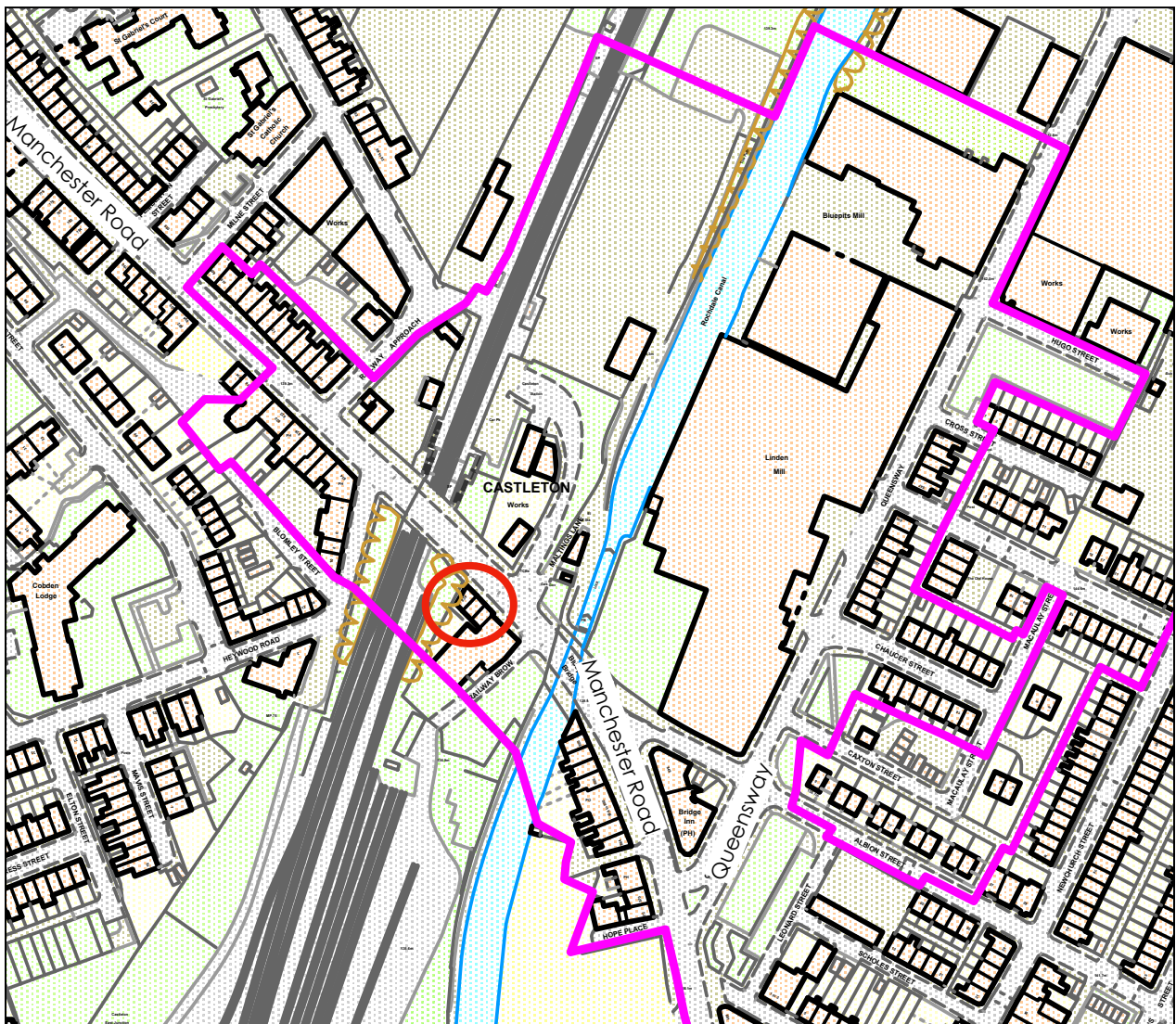


Figure 3: Boundaries of Castleton (South) Conservation Area (source - RMBC) Not to Scale. Application site position shown by red circle.

Plans showing the whole CA are to be found in the CA App. and Figure 3 below shows the CA around immediately around the application site. The boundaries of the area are shown in Figure 3 below (purple line) and which indicates the position (not the extent) of the application site (in red).

As noted earlier, the CA App. is the prime source of information about the historical and architectural interest in the area from which to draw conclusions about significance of the area.

Following the guidance in NPPF para 189, it is not the intention here to describe the whole of the CA but only that character area in which the application site is located. It sits opposite another, industrial, character area but is screened from it by Castleton station opposite. Although the focus here is on the application site and its character area, it is necessary to give some contextual information about the whole of the CA first.

The character of the area is largely a result of its historic development in the industrial revolution, particularly the arrival of the Manchester & Leeds Railway in 1839 which resulted in a population and industry boom, the evidence of which still survives today (CA Appraisal p.4). Its special architectural and historic interest lies predominantly in its distinctive townscape as a result of rapid expansion in the industrial revolution. It is worth noting that the historical maps in the CA App. clearly indicate that much of that development in Castleton and the construction of many of the buildings in the CA took place well after the arrival of the railway and certainly after the canal.

"The importance of the road, canal and rail are clear - with the station forming the focal point, from which the road forms the 'spine' of the settlement and the canal as the life-blood of the industrial heritage." (p.16)

"Castleton demonstrates a distinct separation of industry, residential and retail areas - with the industrial area surrounding the Rochdale Canal, the largely retail area following the spine of Manchester Road and the grid-plan residential area to the east". (p.16)

These quotations are important for the application site since it sits directly opposite the railway station (a "focal point") and on Manchester Road that forms part of the 'spine' of the CA. Further, these features define the three character areas (residential, industrial & retail) shown graphically on p.16. The position and extent of the 'Retail Spine' character area is shown in Figure 4 below.

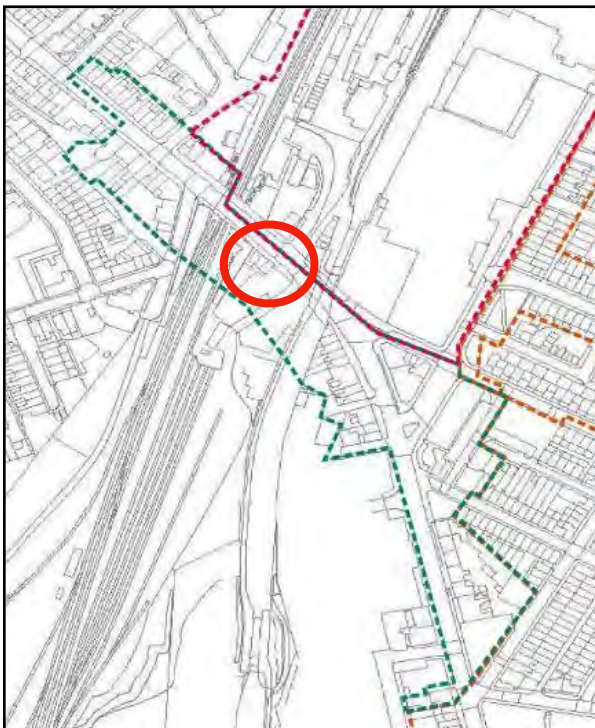


Figure 4: Location and extent of 'Retail Spine' character area (green hatch) with position (not extent) of application site (red)

The distinctiveness of these three areas is part of the overall character of the CA. Even so, some caution might be exercised over this. All CAs have separate character areas but few so large and distinctive as these. There are associative links between them (most obviously the residential and industrial areas) but there will be few, if any, links between industrial and retail areas and if we expected the retail and residential areas to be linked (in the manner of most late 19th century developments) we would expect them to be located much closer to each other.

This does not detract from the significance of the retail character area but serves to show it is reasonable to consider it separately from the others areas.

There are no listed buildings in the CA closer to the application site other than St Martin's Church. This has a raised site but is 450m away round a

bend, so its setting is unlikely to be affected by the application site.

It is important to be clear about the architectural character of the retail character area. At p.29, the CA App. says:

"Much of the retail character of this area can be attributed to the very distinctive shopfront design which can be seen along the length of the conservation area, typified by a central doorway, flanking display windows, frieze and decorative flanking columns with simple, geometric brackets.

It is, to say the least, difficult to ascribe these features wholesale to the retail character area. Of the five parades of shop in the character area, only one (Nos 811-823 Manchester Rd.) clearly has these features and some of these units have been rebuilt. Another two (Nos 848-870 and 816-828), may well have these features but have been so widely altered that it would be difficult to tell definitively. A further two (Nos 885-891 and 836-840) do not have these features at all and may be described as having a different design altogether.

This last category includes the application building, described earlier, and because of its separate design should not conform to the 'standard' set out at p. 29 of the CA App. The subject property does not have 'a central doorway, flanking display windows (or) frieze' and the flanking columns are not decorative and have no geometric brackets.

The 'standard' should be more accurately be seen as an archetype to be aimed for on selected parades only. Figure 5 below shows two contrasting shopfronts in the retail character area.

In other words, it is a stretch to say that the *"very distinctive shopfront ...can be seen along the length of the conservation area"* but the design guidance at p. 39 of the CA App. is satisfactory if invoked in a selective fashion. It would therefore be difficult, if not impossible, to apply the shopfront design and heritage requirements of the CA App. (pp 29 and 26) to the application



building. To do so, the subject building would have to be considerably altered to fit the archetype.

There will never -theless be other requirements to take into consideration. One of these is to do with buildings that make a contribution to the character of the CA and with 'key views'. The subject building is defined as making a 'substantial contribution' to the CA. This is probably to do with its prominence and because it sits opposite the station and the Maltings La. area which are defined as having

Figure 5: Contrasting types of shopfront in the retail character area. No 821 (left hand) is more like 'standard' ideal of the CA App. No 887 (right hand) is if anything more common and resembles very closely that of the application building.

negative impact on the CA. A related factor is to do with the key views that 'unfold' as one travels along Manchester Rd. None are explicitly in the direction of the application building but it is fair to assume its substantial contribution is because of its prominence.

Another requirement relevant to the application site would be in relation to urban form and massing. This is the observation that 'focal buildings' that contrast with the continuous eaves height and materials of adjacent buildings are to be maintained and sustained. In cases like the application site, this will be more important consideration than the design 'standard' referred to earlier. The conclusion is that the key role of the application building lies in its position and relationship to other buildings. It has more to do with urban design and shape than with its specific design features.

Two further factors are relevant.

First, the CA App. makes frequent reference to both building vacancy and maintenance issues in that they have a major detrimental impact on the CA:

"with a number of the buildings in the area suffering from neglect and vacancy." (p.35)

"crucial that the issue of vacancy is tackled at an early stage, and that building owners within a conservation area are aware of the benefits of regular maintenance." (p.36)

"positive measures will taken or supported, wherever possible, to facilitate their continual upkeep and beneficial use" (p.6)

These are issues actively being tackled by the current application. It is intended to make use of all areas of the building (including those currently used for storage) and to convert under-used offices to living space. The building is currently totally vacant. The Rochdale's Core Strategy 2016 gives priority to the 'conservation of heritage assets at risk from decay, giving special attention to designated heritage assets'. The condition of this building is a serious problem that the remedial external works are designed to overcome.

Second, the planning status of the application site is ambivalent in the sense it is part of the CA but also of other actual and putative land-use zones. For example, in the Borough UDP (2006) the site was zoned to sit in the Trub Farm Opportunity Area that would be devoted to mixed use development comprising housing, leisure, retail and employment associated with the canal side and close to Castleton centre.

Some conclusions about the retail character area within the CA can now be summarised:

- The design features of the retail areas along Manchester Road are more varied than the ideal 'standard' form as set out in the CA Appraisal. In fact, some shops are of a signally different design to this standard so different requirements will apply; this includes the subject property. Design demands should be invoked selectively.
- A more widespread feature of the character area is its urban form comprising linear development where prominent buildings contrast with shopping parades of even height and common materials.
- Interest in a CA also arises from history. The importance of road, water and rail communications to the CA is clear yet most of the building development there substantially post-dates the canal and railway. Nor is the area unique, since there are other similarly developed places.
- Building vacancy and lack of maintenance are mentioned several times in the CA Appraisal indicating a degree of degeneration in the area. The subject property shows this clearly. It must be faced that a current feature of the CA is the volume of road traffic passing through to the motorway network, making the village much less pleasant to and convenient in which to shop.

Heritage Values

An appraisal of the heritage values associated with the conservation area is given below. Again, the main focus is on the retail character area.

The appraisal process relates to the range of heritage values outlined by English Heritage (now Historic England, 2008) as: evidential value; historic value; communal value, and aesthetic value.

The purpose is to develop a clear understanding of the significance of the place. Significance may be physical (e.g. architectural features) or less tangible form (e.g. historical associations).

This will give an objective framework by which to appraise the proposals for change. This follows the approach advocated by Historic England and responds directly to para 189, NPPF (2019).

More detail on the proposals themselves and an analysis of how they might affect these values is given later.

Evidential Value

Evidential value “**derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity**”.

In the light of the contextual analysis above, it is clear that the character area reveals important aspects of the development of Castleton, the district and, indeed, further afield (because of the wider importance of the early growth of industrial settlements). To this extent, the buildings (along Manchester Road) should therefore possess very high evidential value.

However, there are two facts (that the links to the other character areas are more tentative, and the shopfronts are more varied, both than are suggested in the CA App.) that detract from this assessment. Also the evidence is relatively recent (125-175 years) and not necessarily unique. The evidential value must be described as moderate.

Historic Value

Historical value “**derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.** It tends to be *illustrative or associative*”.

By the same token as evidential value, the area offers strong historical value by illustrating the form and fabric of early settlements but little by way of direct association with events or people. The historical value is low.

Communal Value

Communal value “**derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory**”.

Since the conservation area covers much of Castleton, it will have high communal value for those, and there will be many of them, who call it their ‘home-town’. The church (St Martin’s Grade II listed) will be valued by many as historically a focal point for communal worship.

It is over a century since Castleton was a distinctly separate place but its identity as a village persists and this is valued highly. Accordingly, the communal value is, at least, moderate-to-high.

Aesthetic Value

Aesthetic value “**derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place**”.

Judging by the comments in the CA App. (about the vacancy rate and poor maintenance of many areas along with the A664 and the shortcomings of many shopfronts that “are having an

increasingly detrimental impact upon the character of the village”), the present aesthetic of the area is limited.

This may be true in the case of individual shops (even individual parades) but the overall the shape and pattern of the urban area is much more pleasing. The CA App. draws close attention to the importance of regular rows of buildings (same height, common materials) contrasting attractively with prominent, taller buildings. This form contributes to the overall consistency of area and is an important feature. The aesthetic value is therefore moderate-to-high.

Statement of Significance

The analysis above assesses the heritage values associated with the conservation area with particular relevance to the proposals site, so a rounded summary of the significance of the character area can be set out. This *statement of significance* is given below.

The proposal site sits at a key point within the retail character area of the Castleton (South) Conservation Area.

The heritage values of the whole conservation area lie primarily in relation to the evidence the buildings provide of the historic development of small industrial settlements associated with cotton spinning. and the retail character area shares this. Though they are of a similar age, links to the houses and remaining mills in the conservation area are not especially strong, so the retail character area must be seen on its own merits. Overall the evidential values are not strong and cannot be said to be decisive.

The historic shopping parades along Manchester Street are clearly at the heart of the character area which is linear, shadowing the shape of the road. The range of shopfront types in the retail character area is wider than might be thought at first and they do not in fact seem to have the distinctiveness ascribed to them by the CA Appraisal. The condition of many parades is poor.

On the other hand, there is much to be said for the attractiveness of the urban form of the village and the rhythm that exists between the many prominent buildings contrasting at intervals with mixed use (retail/live-above-the-shop-flats) parades. These features are welcome in themselves and serve to strengthen unfolding views along the road. They also help to foster the feeling of Castleton as distinct village settlement despite continuous surrounding development.

The aesthetic values associated with these aspects of the urban form are currently the most significant aspect of the character area. The application property, one which makes ‘substantial contribution’ to the character of the area therefore does so primarily because of its prominence and role in allowing views to ‘unfold’ along Manchester Road.

The analysis of the proposals themselves will give a clearer view of the reasons for the choices shown in the application documents.

Analysis of the Proposals

Development within or affecting the setting of a conservation area, including views in or out, must serve to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. Proposals should therefore have a sensitive and appropriate response to context and good attention to detail. They should also avoid adversely affecting important architectural or historic features or distinctive local features or structures unless they bring substantial benefits in return.

Paragraph 193 of the NPPF (2019) states: “When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be)”.

Accordingly, the key question is: would the proposals impact the heritage values of the conservation area?

Summary of the Proposals

The proposal is primarily to convert the top (first) floor into a two-bedroom flat, with a new staircase giving street access from the existing right-hand ground floor door, and external alterations designed to repair and stabilise all three elevations. There will be further internal alterations (see Figure 6 taken from application drawings for detail):



Figure 6: Elevations to Application Property showing proposals described in the text. Not shown to Scale. Colour of render only illustrative.

- (a) All existing internal stone staircases to be capped off or removed so that each floor is self-contained. External access to lower ground floor to be, as now, to the rear.
- (b) ground floor (facing front) and lower ground floor (facing rear) to have some internal partitions removed to open up useable space.

There are other changes with implications externally:

- (a) All upper windows to be replaced with new double-glazed units, sash or similar-looking units to the front. These will be in a colour to match the existing brickwork and to simulate timber casements. Rear upper floor windows to have new size and shape as shown on application drawings. The need to change the windows completely is occasioned by the poor condition of the walls. The front wall has to be rebuilt for safety reasons, see Engineer's report. Those at the rear need to be tied-together since spaces in the brickwork prevent simple repointing, particularly at upper areas. The newly-sized windows at the rear partly to obscure unsightly repairs. New double-doors to rear lower ground floor.
- (b) Right-hand, front roller-shutter door only to be replaced with new one to match existing allowing access via right door for top floor flat. No change to existing shop windows in size or material.
- (c) Entire front, side and rear elevation to be rendered in colour shown indicatively in Figure 6. The purpose of the rendering is remedial. The existing brickwork is in a very poor condition, that could threaten the future of the building. Repointing alone is insufficient as the entire elevation needs to be tied-together. See below for justification of the choice of render and re-profiled stonework to front elevation.

Analysis of Potential Impact

Paragraph 189 of the NPPF (2019) states that, in relation to any description of the significance of heritage assets affected, the 'level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal..'

In the current case, there are two key questions: first, about the change of use of the top floor to living space and, second, the external treatment of the subject property in relation to the heritage values of the area.

As far as the first question is concerned, in general planning terms, the proposal would seem to be acceptable. The Borough UDP map 2006 (still in force until Allocations Development Plan is adopted) shows the application property is not part of the Castleton 'local centre' or the 'linear commercial area' where retail uses might be paramount. There are plans to concentrate the local centre around the station but the upper ground floor of the property will remain in retail use. It is also in an 'area of opportunity' for regeneration purposes where mixed uses (including residential with retail) would be acceptable. The Castleton Station Area Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is only in draft yet but mentions the need to 'introduce new residential uses that provides for a mix of types and densities'.

In heritage terms, the CA App. itself talks of mixed uses of retail with 'living-over-shop' space above and this must include the subject property. A reasonable conclusion would be that residential space would be acceptable here and would add to the vibrancy of the locality at all times.

As far as the second question is concerned, the Statement of Significance above notes that the aesthetic values associated with aspects of the urban form are the most important. The subject property has a type of shopfront different from the 'standard' so its importance lies in relation to its prominence and role in local views.

This is why the building makes a 'substantial contribution' to the conservation area but, fortunately, no changes are envisaged to the scale, height or massing of the building. Accordingly, in terms of its most significant feature, the application building will continue to play its current role to the full in the conservation area.

The CA App. goes on to state (p. 35):

"The introduction of inappropriate renders and replacement of original sash windows and timber doors with UPVC equivalents and inappropriate shutters are issues throughout the town, and are having an increasingly detrimental impact upon the character of the village."

The application proposals envisage the application of render to the elevations (see Figure 6). This is proposed exclusively for remedial purposes. The building is on a slope immediately adjacent to the Leeds-Manchester railway from which it has clearly suffered constant reverberation over more than 125 years. As a consequence, the condition of the brickwork and mortar joints is extremely poor. The future of the building is threatened that, without complete rebuilding, only surface level works would be adequate. According to preliminary professional advice, simple re-pointing would be ineffective, since the joints are too wide and parts of many bricks are missing. Rebuilding would not be economic since it would in effect involve reconstructing the whole building, with probably worse effects on the CA.

Accordingly, the only viable solution - to be clear, to save the building - is to apply a render coat. The quotation from the CA App. refers to 'inappropriate renders' so, presumably, some alternative



can be found that is 'appropriate'. The intention is to avoid anything inappropriate and and seek a solution that is agreeable, mainly in colour.

It is worth observing here some points made in the CA App. itself with regard to the "*number of the buildings in the area suffering from neglect and vacancy*". The present proposals will expressly address this problem with respect to a prominent building that makes a 'substantial contribution' to the conservation area and other remedial working has been taking place to restore the building already. The choice is not between the current proposals and a pristine building, but between them and the loss of the building completely.

The CA App. cites policy G/BE/9 from the Borough UDP (2006, still in force):

"Priority will be given to the practical conservation and enhancement of those features of the built environment which are the most valuable,... such buildings, ... will be protected from... demolition and measures will (be) taken or supported, wherever possible, to facilitate their continual upkeep and beneficial use". (P.6)

It is contended that the current application presents just such an opportunity to 'facilitate their continual upkeep and beneficial use' and prevent demolition.

The CA App also refers to the unwelcome introduction of "shopfronts at odds with the... style characteristic of the retail area along Manchester Road..". However, as pointed out earlier, the style of the shopfront of the application property was designed originally in a different style to that elsewhere along Manchester Rd. so this injunction should not apply here and, in any case, no change to the shop fronts is envisaged.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The proposals have adopted a treatment for the application building that is explicitly designed to preserve and enhance the character of the conservation area. They acknowledge and follow the most important, aesthetic, heritage value in the building that arises because of its role in the urban morphology of Castleton. The scheme retains and conserves the substantial contribution it makes to the area.

'Enhancement' is as much an imperative in a Conservation Area as 'conservation' itself. The CA Appraisal makes clear that 'neglect and vacancy' as well as inappropriate shop fronts are the primary cause of degeneration within that area at present. Prevention will start by tackling neglect and vacancies 'at an early stage' and it is this the proposals are specifically intended to do. They can do nothing about 'inappropriate shopfronts' since its own happens to be different from the ideal case discussed in the CA Appraisal. The need to apply render to the elevations of the building is urgent remedial work without which the building is in danger of demolition. It will have the added benefit of showing that the building is maintained and cared-for and will reduce the the likelihood of vacancies in a location opposite a key focus for investment, Castleton railway station.

Addendum: Conservation Officer's Comments

Since this heritage statement was originally prepared (August 2021), the applicant has requested guidance from the local planning authority (in the way of formal 'pre-application advice') about a new application for consent to the proposals. The original planning application (21/00937/FUL, registered on 25th August 2021) was withdrawn at the suggestion of the planning officer because of the combined impact of the Covid epidemic lockdowns and the time that getting further guidance (a noise assessment report) would take in these circumstances. Nevertheless, certain parts of the overall proposals, in the main external remedial work, had to be carried out urgently to prevent further deterioration.

The conservation officer comments as part of the 'pre-application advice' were as follows:

'As the works have already been completed, they will need to submit a full application with a Heritage Statement as it is in a Conservation Area. I am not happy to see they have instated a roller shutter or the quality of the uPVC door that's been instated. Additionally, the render to the side gable is materially changing the appearance of the Conservation Area generally.'

I may require them to reverse some of the works completed, as a result. The heritage statement should be submitted so that they can analyse the works in terms of heritage impact on the significance of the Conservation Area.'

Any future application should take into account the comments from the Conservation Area Officer and a Heritage Statement should be submitted.

A number of comments need to be made in response (December 2023) to what the conservation officer has said:

1. The works have not 'been completed'. Certainly, certain external parts of them have been finished but only where urgent repairs and the need to maintain weather-tightness were required. We accept, however, that from an external, conservation-area, perspective, it might appear that they have all been completed.
2. Roller-shutter doors have been in place in the property for some considerable time. The 'new' one is simply a smaller replacement, that matches the original, so that the previously covered-over RH front door can be made available to give access to the first floor flat. There is in effect nothing new here and retail properties hereabouts are not viable without adequate security.
3. We would concur that, if the doorway and retail surround of the subject property matched the archetypal shopfront described in the CA App., then an uPVC door would probably be inappropriate. However, as this heritage statement makes clear, the shopfront of the subject property does not match that ideal case but a more common, and less distinctive alternative. It follows that any negative impact of such a door on the conservation area might well be negligible.

Thus, we would submit the proposed door can probably be retained without harm to conservation area but we would be prepared to take into account wider considerations if it is still felt necessary to change the proposed door. In that case, we would look for advice about the type and material a door that would be acceptable.

4. We agree that the side and rear rendering of the property "is materially changing the appearance of the Conservation Area" but, we would maintain, for the better. Conservation areas are assemblages of distinctive buildings, urban forms and views 'which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'². So, some parts of them, like the subject building which is not particularly characterful or distinctive, may only be able to provide enhancement or improvement to the conservation officer. This is one such case and without the urgent remedial work, it appears very likely that demolition would be necessary. See the "Conclusions and Recommendations" section above.

The newly-repaired building now has the appearance of a cared-for structure, capable of active use, *with less risk of vacancy and redundancy*, that will form part of a busy retail and residential area that will attract further investment, particularly when improvements to the station opposite are complete. As this heritage statement makes clear, there are several examples, some immediately nearby, of buildings that have been rendered, giving the same well-maintained appearance to the conservation area.

5. Since the heritage statement was prepared and the conservation officer made her written comments there have been various discussions culminating in a meeting in April 2024. These talks have concentrated on the status and future treatment of the *front elevation* of the building.

² 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act – S.69

6. This heritage statement has shown that the front elevation of the property does not fit the archetypal shopfront design of the retail character area (pp.5-6 above) at ground floor and that it is remarkably featureless above, the only distinguishing aspects being stone cills and window heads (p.2) and the type of brickwork it shares with other buildings. That being said, the building contributes to the retail character partly because of its own shopfront design (p.6) and partly because it is part of the urban form that relies on continuity of building height and materials (p.6). Overlying these considerations is the observation that building vacancy and lack of maintenance are deeply corrosive of the values of the retail character area over time (p.7).
 7. The building was in urgent need of remedial work and now these repairs - rebuilding the front at first floor and rendering the side and rear elevations - have taken place, further vacancies have been averted. The charge however, is that in the haste to secure the condition of the building and because of the COVID lockdown, some of the contribution to the character area has been lost.
 8. If it is assumed that the remedial work is largely irreversible (as in fact many well be the case), what can be done to restore the building's characteristics? One answer would lie in ensuring that those distinctive features of the shopfront at ground floor (door pilasters and pediments above) and window surrounds (cill and heads) at first floor are retained. If the remedial brickwork is considered to be out of keeping with that locally, a sustainable (though perhaps not optimal) solution would be to render the front elevation as well, in a colour to match the pothier elevations. The new windows themselves would be replaced with ones in aluminium (not uPVC) in a dark colour and to replicate the sash mechanisms.
 9. Alternative proposals for the front elevation reflecting these principles have now been submitted as amendments to the planning application and are referred to above in the revised text.
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