

PROPOSED EXTENSION AT THE LOCK HOUSE

LITTLEBOROUGH, ROCHDALE, GREATER MANCHESTER



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

GARRY MILLER
Heritage Consultancy

PROPOSED EXTENSION AT THE LOCK HOUSE

LITTLEBOROUGH, ROCHDALE, GREATER MANCHESTER

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

JULY 2025

GARRY MILLER

Heritage Consultancy

Crosby House, 412 Prescot Road, Eccleston Hill, St Helens, Lancashire WA10 3BT

Telephone: 01744 739675

garrymillerhbc@gmail.com

© Garry Miller 2025

GARRY MILLER HERITAGE CONSULTANCY

Garry Miller is a heritage consultant, architectural historian and published author who has spent more than 40 years studying and working with buildings of town and countryside, in particular those of North West England. His career as a consultant began in the mid-1980s with the Preston-based Nigel Morgan Historic Building Consultancy, of which he became a partner in 1992 upon its rebranding as Datestone. In 1997 he was commissioned by the Heritage Trust for the North West, a buildings preservation trust based at Barrowford, Lancashire, to produce an in-depth regional study of vernacular houses in southwest Lancashire: the result, *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley, 1300-1770* was published in 2002. The book was described as 'scholarship as its best' by *Country Life* (June 2003), and 'well analysed and presented' in *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Vol 48, 2004); and was widely cited in the 2006 *Buildings of England* volume on Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire. Extensive research on the houses of Georgian and Regency Liverpool has also been undertaken, with a view to future publication. Following the success of his Douglas Valley book, Garry Miller established his own consultancy, producing analytical and interpretive reports on historic buildings, in particular the heritage assessments required to support planning applications affecting the historic environment. His area of operation encompasses the North West, Midlands, North Wales and parts of Cumbria and North and West Yorkshire. Several local authorities have cited his assessments as examples of best practice, and reports on more than 150 buildings or sites are produced annually.

THIS REPORT

Date of issue: July 2025

Purpose: for planning submission

Text: Garry Miller

Site survey: Peter Miller

CONTENTS

1: Executive Summary	5
2: The Site	6
3: The Proposal/Scope of this Report	8
4: The Application Building	10
5: Significance of the Application Building	15
6: Planning Policy Context	16
7: Impact of the Proposal	17

1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports proposed works at The Lock House, which is located in the Ealees district of Littleborough in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The application property is, as its name suggests, was built as a lockkeeper's cottage on the Rochdale Canal, overlooking Lock 48, but is now a private residence. The property is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for a single-storey extension at the application property. This follows refusal of an earlier scheme in February 2024 (planning reference 23/01190/HOUS) and its subsequent dismissal at appeal, along with an extensive pre-application enquiry undertaken thereafter. The heritage issue arising is the impact upon the significance (heritage interest and value) of the non-designated building.

The significance of The Lock House derives from its association with the first phase of the Rochdale Canal, and therefore dates probably from the period 1794-1798. The property has however undergone considerable alteration, including mock timber-framing and new windows, and hence this significance now derives from its historical associations with the canal along with its group value with Lock 48 and the Ealees Bridge, rather than its own individual qualities. A modern conservatory forms a negative addition and does not contribute to the significance of the application building, as do its other modern alterations.

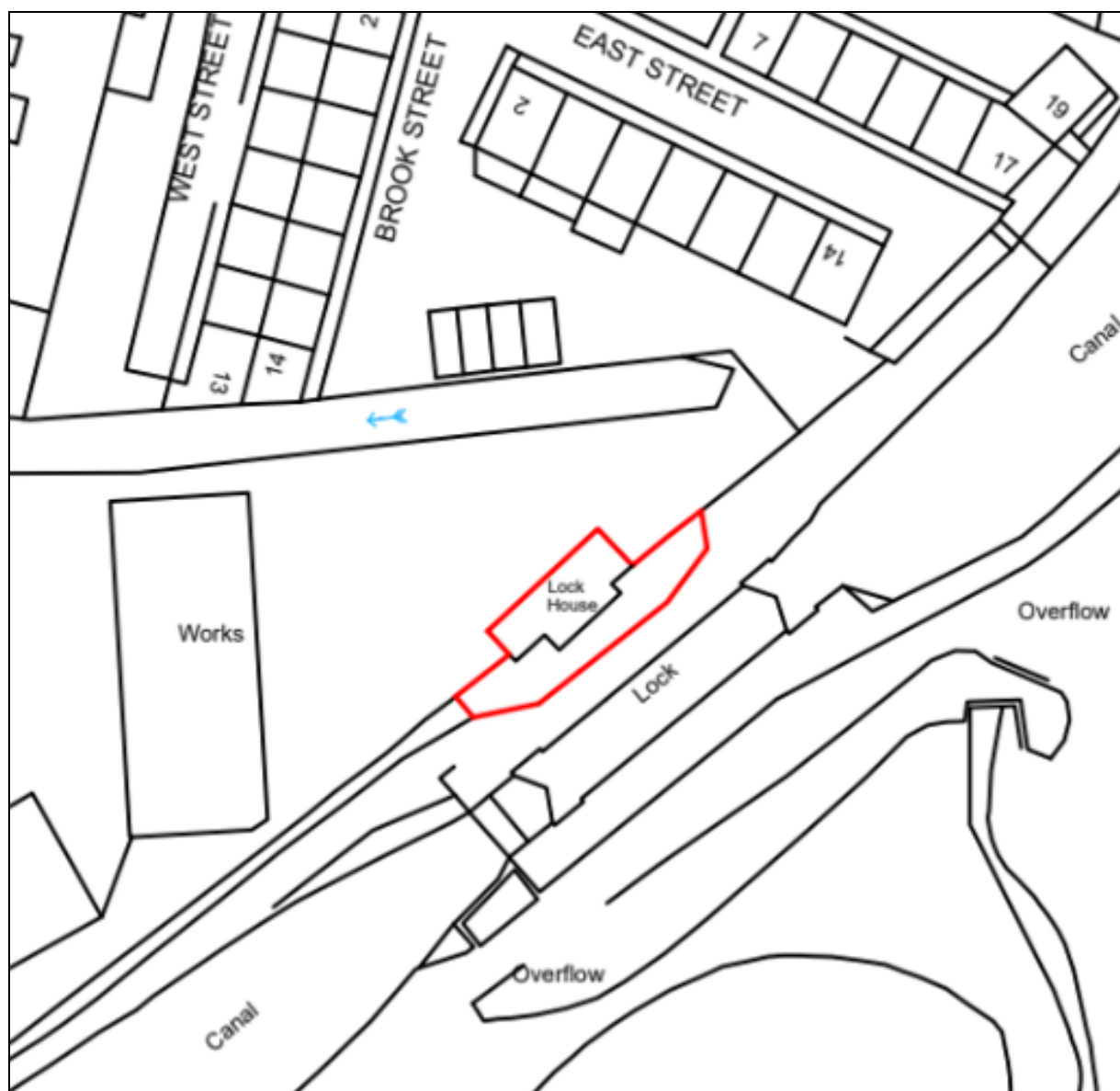
The council have previously resisted an extension on the left side of the building, based on the opinion that it would obscure a jettied area which they believed to be historic. A limited investigation of the fabric has now demonstrated that this is a feature created during a 1960s-1970s makeover that changed the appearance of the building. The jetty, along with its arched beam and brick pillars, have no heritage value other than to record the alterations made at this time. There is therefore no heritage reason to regard these features as an obstacle to extending the building at this end. Accordingly, the applicant has proposed a design which removes the detractive conservatory and introduces a single-storey, subservient extension that clearly preserves the legibility and significance of the original building.

Where heritage assets are undesignated, national guidance requires simply a balanced planning judgment that weighs the significance of the asset against any harm or loss; the relevant local development plan policy requires the asset's conservation and protection. The proposal as submitted satisfies both these tests as it will result in no adverse effect on the historical associations and group value from which the significance of the altered, undesignated building primarily derives, while retaining the legibility of its original form and removing the detractive modern conservatory.

The proposal therefore merits approval without delay.

2: THE SITE

The application property is The Lock House, which is located in the Ealees district on the eastern fringe of the town of Littleborough in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The application property is, as its name suggests, was built as a lockkeeper's cottage on the Rochdale Canal, but is now a private residence. It stands on the canal towpath, adjoining Lock 48, while to the rear the ground steeply falls to the Ealees Brook and mid-19th century terraced cottages beyond, built probably for workers at the now-demolished Brookfield Cotton Mill which stood to the west of the application property.



Map 1. Location of the application property



1. *The Lock House, viewed from across Lock 48*



2. *More distant view from the canal's western towpath*

3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

3.1 Proposed development

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for a single-storey extension at the application property. This follows refusal of an earlier scheme in February 2024 (planning reference 23/01190/HOUS) and its subsequent dismissal at appeal, along with an extensive pre-application enquiry undertaken thereafter.

3.2 Designation

The Lock House is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset by Rochdale MBC. It also stands within the wider setting of the Grade II listed Ealees Bridge over the Rochdale Canal.

3.3 Heritage impact

The heritage issue arising is the impact upon the significance (heritage interest and value) of the undesignated building. It was established in the original application that the setting of the listed bridge was unaffected owing to separation distance.

3.4 Scope and purpose of this report

Paragraph 207 of Chapter 16 (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*) the National Planning Policy Framework (as revised, December 2024) states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the particular significance of the heritage asset, including the contribution made by its setting.

The scope and purpose of this report is therefore to identify the significance of the non-designated building and to assess how this will be affected by the proposal. In accordance with paragraph 207, the level of detail is considered proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset, and no more than necessary to understand the impact of the proposal.

The report is to be read in conjunction with other documentation submitted in support of the application.

3.5 Report structure

This is as follows:

1. A concise, proportionate description of the undesignated building (Section 4)
2. A summary of its heritage significance (Section 5)
3. A summary of the planning policy context in which the application will be determined (Section 6)
4. Evaluation within this context of the impact of the proposal upon the significance of the undesignated building (Section 7).

4: THE APPLICATION BUILDING

4.1 Overview

Altered lockkeeper's cottage adjoining the Ealees Lock of the Rochdale Canal.



3. Panoramic view of the cottage adjoining lock 48

4.2 Historical context

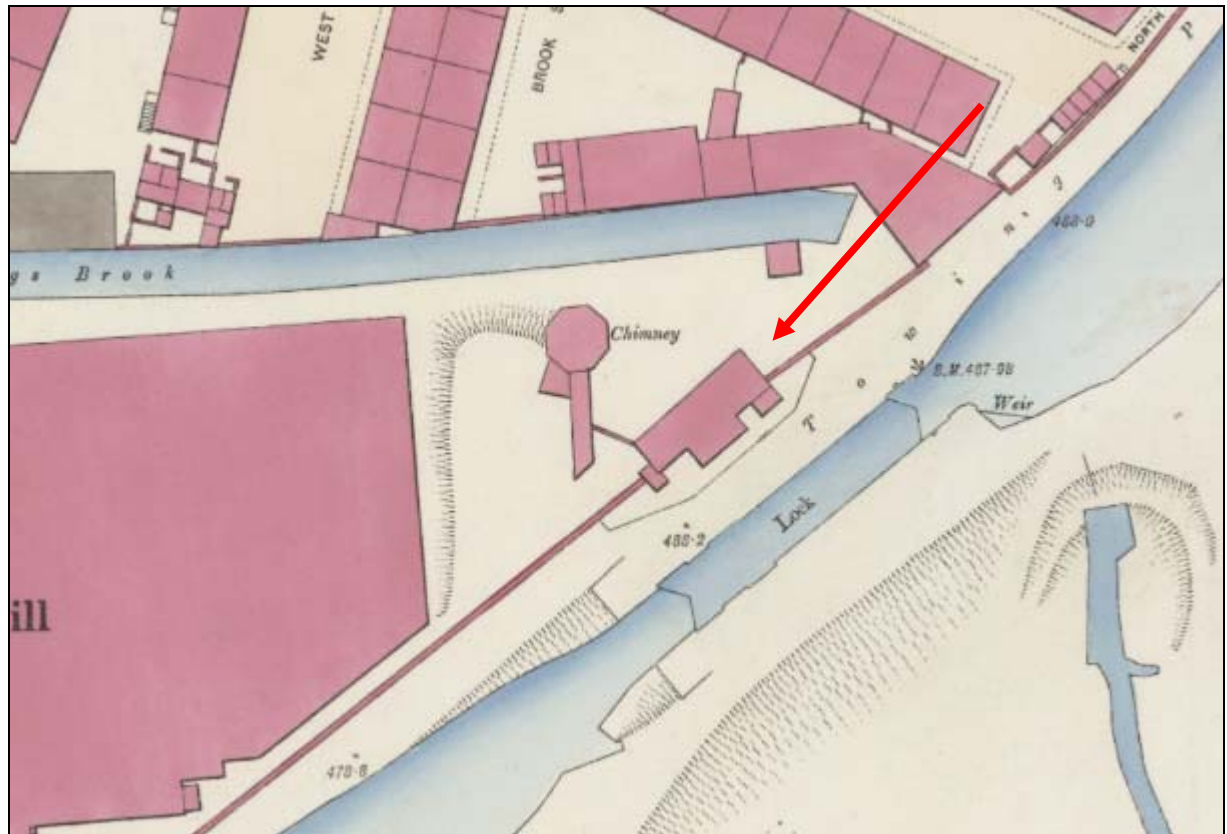
The application property was built to serve the Rochdale Canal, first proposed in 1776 to connect the mills of Sowerby Bridge in Yorkshire with Manchester. The scheme however encountered various setbacks and the act for its consent was not finally obtained until April 4, 1794. The Rochdale branch opened first, in 1798, with further sections the following year, but the canal did not officially open until 1804, with some construction work continuing thereafter and a Heywood-Castleton branch opening as late as 1834. The 32-mile canal was in its heyday the principal commercial route between Lancashire and Yorkshire, carrying cotton, coal, wool, timber and other commodities. Trade however fell significantly following the opening of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway in 1841, and steadily declining traffic in the late 19th and early 20th century eventually led to the closure of most of the canal in 1952. Following restoration work the canal reopened to navigation in 2002.

4.3 The building itself

The application property is a three-storey structure situated adjoining the Ealees Lock (Lock 48), the bottom lock of the Littleborough flight and one of 92 on the canal in total. The property originally dates probably from 1794-1798, the date of the construction of the Rochdale section of the canal. It occupies a shallow T-shaped footprint, with a projecting gabled centre section, but the OS mapping of the mid-1840s (Map 2, below) shows a slightly different shape with extensions at each end, which still remained in 1890-1891 (Map 3). The ground floor (level with the canal towpath) and basement are of stone, but the upper floor is rendered with mock timber framing. The latter is a mid-20th century attempt to decorate a building that would otherwise have had a functional appearance (see Section 7). The mock framing has also experienced some alteration, as a slightly different pattern in the front gable is shown on a drawing of probably 1970s date (Plate 4). All windows are modern, and are shown as being small-paned in the 1970s drawing, which also depicts a lean-to porch right of the gabled projection. The ground floor window in this projection appears to have replaced a door, and a blocked opening to its left appears to be the original window, adjoining a side window that allowed views westwards along the canal. The roof is of slate with terracotta ridge tiles. Right of the gabled section is a single-storey modern conservatory, while to the left of it the first floor is jettied out, supported at the left end by a post on a large padstone. This again is a mid-20th century embellishment (again, see Section 7).



Map 2. The property as depicted by the six-inch OS map surveyed 1847-1848



Map 3. How it is depicted by the OS 50-inch town plan of 1890-1891



4. Probably 1970s drawing of the application property, showing porch and slightly different gable framing pattern



5. The property viewed from the west, showing jettied first floor left of projection



6. View from east showing modern conservatory



7. Ground floor central window seems to have replaced doorway; blocked window to its right



8. The building viewed from Brook Street to the north

5: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE APPLICATION BUILDING

5.1 Rationale

Paragraph 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimize conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Significance is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

5.2 Summary

The significance of the Lock House derives from being a lockkeeper's cottage associated with the first phase of the Rochdale Canal, and therefore dating probably from the period 1794-1798. The property has however undergone considerable alteration, including mock timber-framing, a jetty and new windows, and hence this significance now derives from its historical associations with the canal along with its group value with Lock 48 and the Ealees Bridge, rather than its own individual qualities. The modern conservatory forms a negative addition and so does not contribute to the significance of the application building, as do its other modern alterations.

6: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance on how applications affecting the historic environment are to be determined. Paragraph 210 states that local planning authorities should take account of:

- *The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation*
- *The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, and*
- *The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*

Regarding non-designated heritage assets, paragraph 216 specifically applies:

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.

Locally, Policy P2a (Protecting and Enhancing Character, Landscape and Heritage) of the Rochdale Core Strategy, formally adopted on October 19, 2016, states that key heritage assets, both statutory and non-statutory, will be conserved, enhanced and promoted, including consideration of their wider settings.

7: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

7.1 The refused scheme/pre-application enquiry

The original refused scheme involves removal of the modern conservatory and addition of a single-storey stone extension to the front of the property, with first floor balconies on either side, as shown in the visualisation below.



9. Visualisation of the proposed extension

The council's stance during the pre-application enquiry made following the refusal at appeal has been to advocate only the replacement of the modern conservatory by a single-storey extension. A design suggested by the council's urban design officer is shown below:



10. Single-storey extension on right side as preferred by Rochdale MBC

The council resisted proposals for an extension on the left side, which is considered by the applicant to be a more practical option as services already exist there. The council's objections were based upon the existing jettied-out first floor on this side, which they consider to be a historic feature, with the planning officer commenting:

"...any proposals which obscures key architectural features, including but not limited to the jettied first floor and supporting piers, would result in less than substantial harm and are unlikely to be supported."

7.2 Rebuttal

As a result of the council's statement that it was a key feature, an inspection of the jettied area was subsequently undertaken in May 2025 by Garry Miller Heritage Consultancy to determine its originality. The findings of this were as follows:

- **The jetty is modern, not historic**
- **Hence it is not a key architectural feature that merits protection**
- **The evidence suggests that it was created during a 1960s-1970s makeover which also gave the building its present imitation timber frame on the first floor**
- **This 'timber frame' appears to been painted on cement render**
- **As an industrial building, the Lock House when first built would have been of a rugged, functional appearance with exposed masonry, as now remains on the ground floor**
- **The timber-frame decoration was seemingly an attempt to 'prettify' what would otherwise have been a workaday structure**
- **It is therefore an inappropriate and unsympathetic treatment that is out of character with the building**
- **The timber-framing is shown in a probably 1970s sketch of the building, hence it dates from this time or the 1960s, a period known for its often-inconsiderate treatment of historic buildings**
- **The jettied first floor, and the arched beam beneath it, are also shown on this sketch and examination of the fabric itself implies they was created when the timber-framing was applied**
- **The jetty is supported on a pair of boxed-in steel beams at the front, a construction method which is clearly not of the 1790s**
- **The arch beneath it serves no structural purpose and is purely decorative**

- The posts supporting the jetty are in fact brick pillars boxed in with timber
- The brick is a grey stock brick which is frequently found in 1960s/1970s work
- Beneath the render the front wall of the jetty appears to be of the same stock brick
- The evidence therefore points to the front of the building being jettied out during the 1970s makeover to create what was considered to be a decorative feature with no historical relevance or authenticity to the site



11. The probably 1970s sketch which shows the timber framing, jetty and arch in place



12. Steel beam supporting the jetty



13. Boxed-in stock brick pillar supporting the steel beam



14. Outer wall above the steel beams is also stock brick



15. Corbel supporting the jetty stops short and appears to have been inserted



16. The arched beam beneath the jetty serves no structural function

7.3 Concluding statement

The council's objections to an extension on the left side of the building have been based on the opinion that it would obscure the jetty, which they believed to be historic. A limited investigation of the fabric has now demonstrated that this is a feature created during a 1960s-1970s makeover that changed the appearance of the building. The jetty, arched beam and brick pillars have no heritage value other than to record the alterations made at this time. There is therefore no heritage reason to regard these features as an obstacle to extending the building at this end. Accordingly, the applicant has proposed a design which removes the detractive conservatory and introduces a single-storey, subservient extension at the left end that clearly preserves the legibility and significance of the original building, as shown below.



17. Front elevation showing the proposed extension

Where heritage assets are undesignated, national guidance requires simply a balanced planning judgment that weighs the significance of the asset against any harm or loss; the relevant local development plan policy requires the asset's conservation and protection. The proposal as submitted satisfies both these tests, favourably replacing the conservatory by a modest, sympathetically-designed extension, and having no adverse effect on the historical associations and group value from which the significance of the altered, undesignated building primarily derives and retaining the legibility of its original form.

The proposal therefore merits approval without delay.