



NORTHEdge

Planning and Access Statement

193-195 Drake Street,
Rochdale,
OL16 1PJ

Prepared By:

Northedge Architecture

July 2025

Introduction

This statement has been prepared on behalf of the applicant in support of a full planning application for the change of use of two vacant buildings at 193 & 195 Drake Street, Rochdale, from their current (vacant) use, previously offices (class E), to a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) primary school (Use Class F.1).

The proposal seeks to bring the buildings back into active use to provide much-needed specialist primary education provision for children requiring additional social, emotional and mental health support. The application relates solely to a change of use; no external alterations or extensions are proposed, as the existing structure and layout are considered broadly suitable for the intended educational function.

The planning application is supported by this statement, which sets out the background to the proposal and provides an assessment of its compliance with relevant planning policy. Specifically, the statement includes:

- A description of the application site and its existing access;
- An overview of the proposed change of use;
- A summary of relevant local planning policy and national guidance;
- A review of comparable planning history in the local area;
- A concluding appraisal of the scheme's suitability and benefits.

This should be read in conjunction with the accompanying application documents, including the completed forms and certificates and existing / proposed drawings.

The Application Site

The application site comprises 193 and 195 Drake Street, Rochdale, OL16 1PJ, two adjoining mid-terraced buildings located within a mixed-use area to the south-east of Rochdale Town Centre. The buildings are currently vacant, however marketing material for the properties suggests it was previously a probation centre and has been altered to provide office accommodation.

The site is situated on the eastern side of Drake Street, a key arterial route into the town centre. The buildings are of traditional brick construction and arranged over four levels: basement, ground floor, first floor, and second floor. There is an existing car park to the rear of the site, accessed via Norfolk Street, which provides 14 off-street parking bays. This area also includes a pedestrian ramp and stairs, providing level and stepped access into the rear of the building.

The main pedestrian entrance is located on Drake Street and accessed via three external steps leading up to each entrance door. The surrounding area is urban in character, comprising buildings with a mix of uses with strong building frontages along Drake Street.

The site benefits from good access to public transport, with Castlemere Street bus stop located just a short walk away, offering connections to Rochdale Town Centre and the wider borough.

Figure 1: Aerial view of the application site (outlined in red).



About SEMH Primary

SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) schools provide tailored education for children who experience challenges with emotional regulation, behavior, and mental health. These settings offer specialist support, therapeutic interventions, and adapted learning environments to meet individual needs. This proposal aims to provide much-needed SEMH primary school provisions in the area.

Use & Layout

The existing buildings at 193 and 195 Drake Street are arranged over four levels: basement, ground floor, first floor, and second floor. Internally, the layout comprises a mix of rooms that previously served as offices, meeting rooms, kitchens, and storage spaces.

The proposal seeks to retain the current internal arrangement as far as possible, with any internal reconfiguration or refurbishment to suit the operational needs of a SEMH primary school. The layout will accommodate classrooms, staff offices, breakout spaces, and therapeutic support rooms suitable for children with social, emotional and mental health needs.

No extensions or changes to the structure are proposed. The existing configuration of the buildings is considered appropriate to facilitate the intended educational use, offering a variety of flexible spaces across all floors.

Amount

The total internal floor area across all four levels of the building (excluding hallways) is approximately 671.6 square metres. The breakdown by floor is as follows:

- Basement: 133.1 sqm
- Ground Floor: 191.6 sqm
- First Floor: 161.3 sqm
- Second Floor: 185.6 sqm

No increase in floor space is proposed as part of this application. The proposal relates solely to a change of use of the existing buildings, with no changes to the footprint or external structure.

Operation

Applicant statement.

*Our school is a specialist SEND provision supporting children and young people aged **5 to 11** with a range of complex needs, including **Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties, moderate learning difficulties (MLD)**, and associated communication or behavioural challenges. We provide a highly structured, nurturing environment tailored to individual needs, with small class sizes, high staff-to-pupil ratios, and integrated therapeutic support. Our objective is to deliver a personalised, aspirational curriculum that promotes academic achievement, emotional regulation, life skills, and preparation for adulthood. We work closely with families, local authorities, and external professionals to ensure each pupil receives the support and opportunities they need to thrive both in school and beyond.*

*Our SEN primary school operates in compliance with UK educational standards for school hours, while maintaining the flexibility required to meet the individual needs of our pupils as outlined in their **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)**. Recognising that many children with SEND may need a gradual or supported transition into full-time education, we implement **phased timetables** and personalised attendance plans where appropriate. This approach allows pupils to build confidence, regulate their emotions, and gradually adapt to the structured school environment in a way that promotes long-term engagement and wellbeing. Timings are reviewed regularly in collaboration with parents, carers, and professionals to ensure they remain appropriate and supportive for each child's development.*

Staff

The number of full-time and part-time staff required in our SEN primary school is determined by the individual and collective needs of the children, which can vary significantly based on the complexity of their educational, emotional, and therapeutic requirements. While staffing ratios are established in line with each pupil's EHCP and risk assessments, our preferred approach is to employ all core staff on a **full-time basis** to provide consistency, stability, and continuity of care. This includes **teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral staff, administrators, and kitchen/catering staff** such as the school cook. Full-time staffing not only supports stronger relationships with pupils but also ensures a cohesive, well-trained team that can respond flexibly and effectively to the evolving needs of the school community.

It is established that up to 35 full time staff would be at the school as the core staff members.

Parking

The site benefits from 14 existing parking bays located in a rear car park accessed via a vehicle entrance from Norfolk Street. In addition, there is pedestrian access from the rear of the building via a ramp and stairs, allowing for level access. The main pedestrian entrance is located on Drake Street, accessed via three steps up to each entrance door.

Access

Vehicular access is via Norfolk Street, which leads directly to the rear car park. Pedestrian access is provided both from the rear of the building (via stairs and a ramp) and from the front, where the main entrance is situated on Drake Street. The proposal maintains all current access points, with improvements to inclusivity supported by the ramped entrance at the rear.

Scale and Appearance

The scale and appearance will be maintained in keeping with the existing building as there will be no alterations or extensions, due the current structure suiting the primary school operations. The proposal is for change of use only, and all adaptations will occur within the existing structure. As such, the visual character of the building and its relationship to the surrounding context will remain unaffected.

Planning Policy

This Planning Statement has been prepared with regards to the statutory development plan and relevant national planning policy, which collectively guide the assessment of this application.

The Development Plan for Rochdale comprises the Rochdale Core Strategy (2016), the Rochdale Borough Unitary Development Plan (saved policies, 2006), and the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (2024). These documents provide the strategic framework for development within the borough.

- The Rochdale Core Strategy (2016) supports the provision of educational and community facilities in appropriate locations to meet local needs, emphasising accessibility and amenity considerations (see Policy C7 - Delivering Education Facilities and Policy CF/2 - General Criteria for Community and Health Facilities).
- The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (2024) promotes sustainable development across Greater Manchester, including policies to encourage the reuse of existing buildings for community uses, measures to tackle and adapt to climate change, and policies to improve transport accessibility (Policies G1, G8, T1 and T2). This supports development that minimises travel demand and encourages active travel modes such as walking and cycling.
- The Rochdale Unitary Development Plan (saved policies, 2006) continues to provide relevant policies for community facility development and amenity protection until fully superseded.

Planning and Access Statement

The NPPF (2023 update) sets out the government's planning policies for England and emphasises a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant provisions include:

- Promoting Healthy Communities: Highlights the importance of accessible local community facilities that meet population needs.
- Promoting Sustainable Transport: Supports locating development where the need to travel is minimised and where public transport and active travel options are available.
- Making Effective Use of Land: Encourages the reuse of existing buildings for community and other uses.

The proposed change of use to a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) primary school within existing buildings at Drake Street aligns with these policies by bringing a vacant property back into beneficial community use, meeting identified educational needs, and providing good accessibility via public transport.

Planning History

In accordance with best practice, a review of the site's planning history was undertaken in July 2025 using Rochdale Council's online planning portal. The applications identified, which are of relevance to this proposal or to similar educational uses within the vicinity, are listed below for reference.

It is of particular significance that the Council has recently granted permission for the change of use of an existing building from a former children's nursery to a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school (Class F1) at 21 Whitehall Street, Rochdale (application ref: 24/00724/FUL).

Relevant planning applications identified include:

- Ref: 24/00724/FUL
Description: Change of use from a former children's nursery (Class E) to an SEN school (Class F1) including the creation of a bicycle store, bin store, associated car parking and boundary treatments.
Location: 21 Whitehall Street, Rochdale OL12 0LN
Decision and Date: Granted subject to conditions, 24 September 2024.
- Ref: 25/00288/FUL
Description: Application for a temporary change of use to an independent special school (Use Class F1) together with alterations to car park and erection of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) and enclosed outdoor space.
Location: Link House, Stakehill Industrial Park, Finlan Road, Middleton M24 2RW
Decision and Date: Application validated 10 April 2025, currently awaiting decision.
- Ref: 24/00568/FUL
Description: Change of use of dwelling house (Use Class C3) into Special Educational Needs School (Use Class F1(a)); demolition of outbuilding; erection of new single storey classroom building together with alterations to existing access and car park and the installation of multi-use games area and fencing.
Decision and Date: Refused 7 November 2024. Appeal status currently awaiting decision.

Conclusion

Planning and Access Statement

The proposed change of use of 193 and 195 Drake Street to a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) primary school represents a sustainable and beneficial reuse of two currently vacant buildings in a well-connected location.

The scheme will deliver much-needed specialist educational provision for young children requiring additional support, contributing to the diversity and inclusivity of Rochdale's education offer. The use will bring the property back into active service, generating social value and supporting community well-being.

Importantly, the proposals involve no external changes, meaning there will be no visual or physical impact on the surrounding area. The development aligns with both national and local planning policy objectives, including those set out in the Rochdale Core Strategy and the Places for Everyone Plan, which encourage the reuse of existing buildings and the delivery of community infrastructure in sustainable locations.

In accordance with paragraph 99 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), significant weight should be given to proposals that support the delivery of new educational facilities, especially where they meet identified local needs.