

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	21.01.26
Application Reference	25/01118/FUL
Address	The Church Inn, Castle Hill Road, Bury, BL9 6UH
Proposal	Change of use of the Church Inn from a public house and restaurant to an office (Use Class E(g)(i)), including alterations to the existing building, raising of the roof, erection of a detached storage building, and re-arranged parking and landscaping.

Introduction

The [National Design Guide](#) sets out the ten characteristics of a well-designed place. Well-designed places have individual characteristics which work together to create its physical **Character**. The ten characteristics help to nurture and sustain a sense of **Community**. They work to positively address environmental issues affecting **Climate**. They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#).

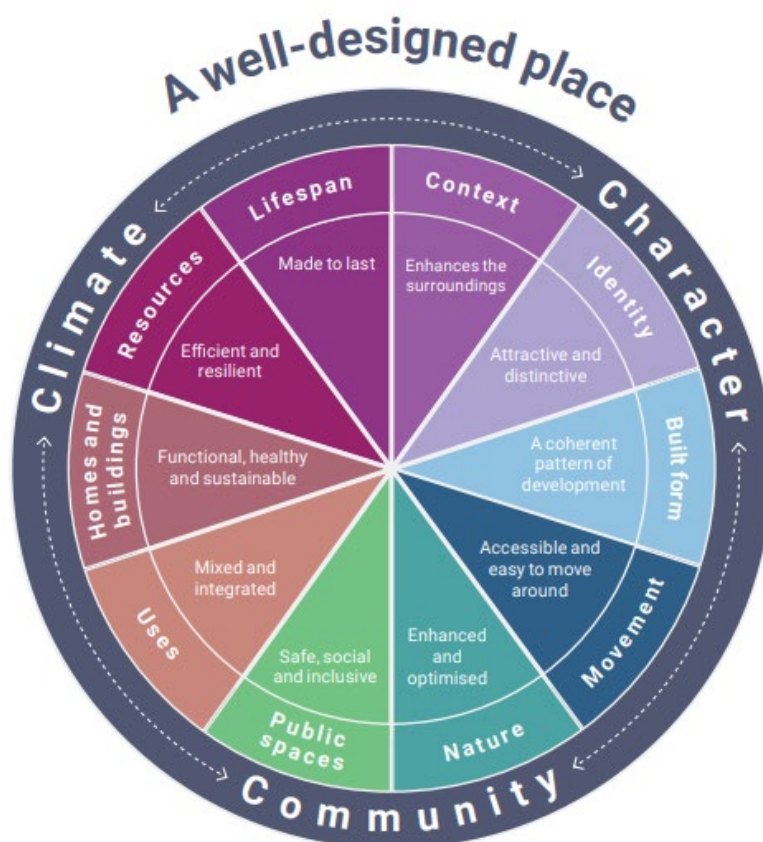


Figure: The ten characteristics of a well-designed place

Source: National Design Guide, 2021
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Assessment

This assessment has been made against:

National Guidance:

- The National Planning Policy Framework
- The ten characteristics of a well-designed place contained within the National Design Guide
- National Model Design Code
- Building for a Healthy Life design toolkit

Local Policy:

- Rochdale Core Strategy policies:
 - S03 – To improve design, image and quality of place
 - P3 – Improving design of new development
 - DMI (General Development Requirements)
- Supplementary Planning Documents:
 - Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide

The Unitary Development Plan

- G/BE/1 - Design Quality
- BE/2 - Design Criteria for New Development

Places for Everyone Plan

Crossover with Greenbelt policy and preserving heritage in the borough P2 /P3 / JP G9 / JP-S1/ PE5

SUMMARY

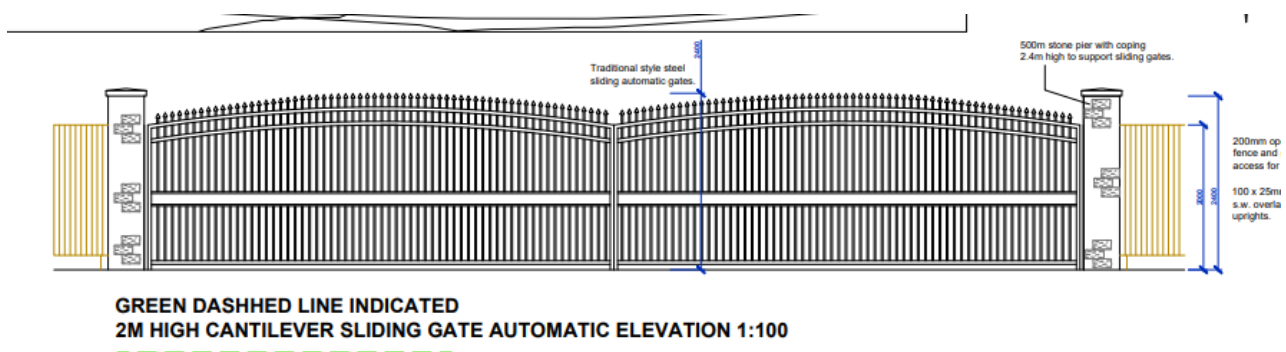
The refurbishment of the original building and the principle of upgrading the 1970s extension could be supported subject to refinement and conservation input. However, the wider scheme introduces a series of large, visually assertive structures that are poorly integrated and out of keeping with the rural and historic context. In particular, the plant storage building and amenity block fundamentally alter the character of the site, undermining the setting of the former inn and the wider Green Belt. The landscape strategy does not sufficiently mitigate these impacts or form a coherent design response. Taken together, the proposals result in a fragmented and over-engineered composition that does not represent good design in this sensitive location.

I am therefore unable to support the scheme in its current form.

Arrival

The proposed operational requirements appear to drive the inclusion of a large vehicular gate, plant storage and an amenity store. While functional needs are acknowledged, the scale and visual dominance of the gate is markedly out of character with the rural settlement pattern of Birtle, where boundary treatments are typically defined by dry-stone walls, hedgerows and modest openings.

There are examples of ironmongery gates in the area, though they do not always sit comfortably within the rural and historic context. Given the unusually wide opening at this site, the proposed sliding gates would appear visually dominant and engineered, conflicting with the traditional pattern of modest stone-walled entrances. They are unlikely to be an appropriate solution for this setting, and further advice from the Conservation Officer is recommended.



Parking

The concentration of parking at the site frontage further compounds this issue. Design policy consistently discourages frontage-dominated parking arrangements, particularly where they erode the sense of arrival or diminish the contribution of the building to the street scene. In this case, the accommodation of larger commercial vehicles at the entrance reinforces an industrialised character that sits uncomfortably within the Green Belt context and the setting of a non-designated heritage asset.

Church Inn Renovation (original structure)

I would defer to the Conservation Officer regarding any alterations to the original structure, including the appropriate scale and form of extensions. From a design perspective, the conversion should prioritise retaining the inherent character and material quality of the former inn, with careful attention to the selection and detailing of new materials.

If feasible, the removal of the existing paint from the original stonework could significantly enhance the building's appearance and strengthen the transition between the zinc-clad elements and the historic fabric. The practicality and conservation implications of such an approach would be encouraged.

Cladding and refurbishment of the 1970s front extension



Pigmented zinc cladding
Vertical orientation

The proposed change in materiality to the 1970s front extension is acceptable in principle. The existing structure has limited architectural merit, and while this does not justify further poor design, it does allow scope for a more contemporary and subservient treatment that respects the character of the original inn. It should however be emphasised, for such an approach to be acceptable, the scale of extension in relation to the original inn should be suitable as to not over dominate, and any details and material selection should be to a very high standard.

Subject to refinement, this element of the proposal could form an appropriate refurbishment of the existing extension. The precedent image provided by the designer (and included above) is encouraging. With comparable quality of detailing, the scheme could meet design policy expectations for high-quality architectural design. A simpler material palette would strengthen the proposal; zinc cladding alone would provide a more coherent and robust finish, whereas the introduction of timber risks creating an unnecessarily and overly busy appearance.

Further consideration should also be given to the window arrangement to ensure a more consistent alignment with the proposed contemporary façade. This should be approached as part of the modern intervention rather than attempting to replicate the irregularity of the historic building, as the current configuration results in an unresolved visual clash with an inharmonious scale.

If the principle of the extension is supported by the case officer, detailed drawings and material specifications should be secured to allow the design to be fully resolved.

Plant Storage Building

The proposed plant storage building appears significantly larger in scale than the original inn and visually overwhelms it. The absence of contextual site sections makes it difficult to understand how the various structures relate to one another across the changing levels of the site, which is essential given the sensitivity of the location.

The landscaping intended to soften the massing feels contrived, and while screening is understandable for a structure of this size, it also contributes to a further loss of openness that previously characterised the site. Taken together, these factors raise fundamental concerns about whether a use dependent on large HV vehicles is appropriate in this Green Belt location, particularly in such close proximity to a non-designated heritage asset and the Grade II listed Church of St John the Baptist.

The materials and design approach for the plant building are also problematic. The extended material palette alters the character of the site abruptly. The designer may have drawn inspiration from agricultural buildings but this is not a farmstead context, and the approach does not integrate successfully with the historic inn or the rural settlement pattern. The result is a busy and visually discordant composition.

Given the scale, siting and design of the plant building, the proposal is likely to undermine both the significance of the former public house and the wider rural setting. This element of the scheme requires careful review to determine whether the level of harm is acceptable or can be mitigated.

Timber Clad Amenity Building

The proposed amenity building is poorly designed and not suited to the context. Its form and appearance are more reminiscent of a modular pod than a structure that responds to the character of the former inn or the wider rural setting. As a result, it sits uncomfortably within the site and contributes to an increasingly fragmented design language across the scheme. The cumulative effect is a lack of coherence that does not support or enhance the significance of the original public house.



Landscape and Green Infrastructure

It would be helpful for the plans to show the current tree cover and landscape features so that the extent of change can be properly understood. For example, neither the existing nor proposed plans identify the H2 hedgerows with wild cherry trees that line the entrance, which are an important part of the site's arrival sequence and rural character. These elements should be shown contextually to inform a responsible and accurate assessment.

It is also unclear how the proposed landscaping meaningfully informs the overall design. The scheme does not read as a landscape-led approach; instead, a large proportion of new tree planting is concentrated in a single area, giving the impression of a response driven primarily by biodiversity net gain requirements rather than a coherent site strategy. By contrast, the proposed staff garden is a small, peripheral space replacing the former beer garden, representing a missed opportunity to integrate amenity, character and BNG outcomes more holistically.

A key constraint appears to be the siting, and the necessity of the plant storage and the amenity structures, which occupies land that could otherwise support a more balanced and integrated landscape strategy.

Drawing Information

- Inclusion of contextual drawings including site plans are required.
- Site sections required.

Going forward

The scheme could be supported with just the tactful renovation of the former inn structure and 1970s extension, but this directly clashes with the use and operation of the client's business.