

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	02.03.26
Application Reference	25/01034/FUL
Address	61 Church Street Heywood OL10 1LJ
Proposal	Demolition of existing building and construction of new 3 storey building, with commercial (Use Class E) at ground floor and 2 x 3 bed flats at first floor and second floor and creation of parking to rear

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

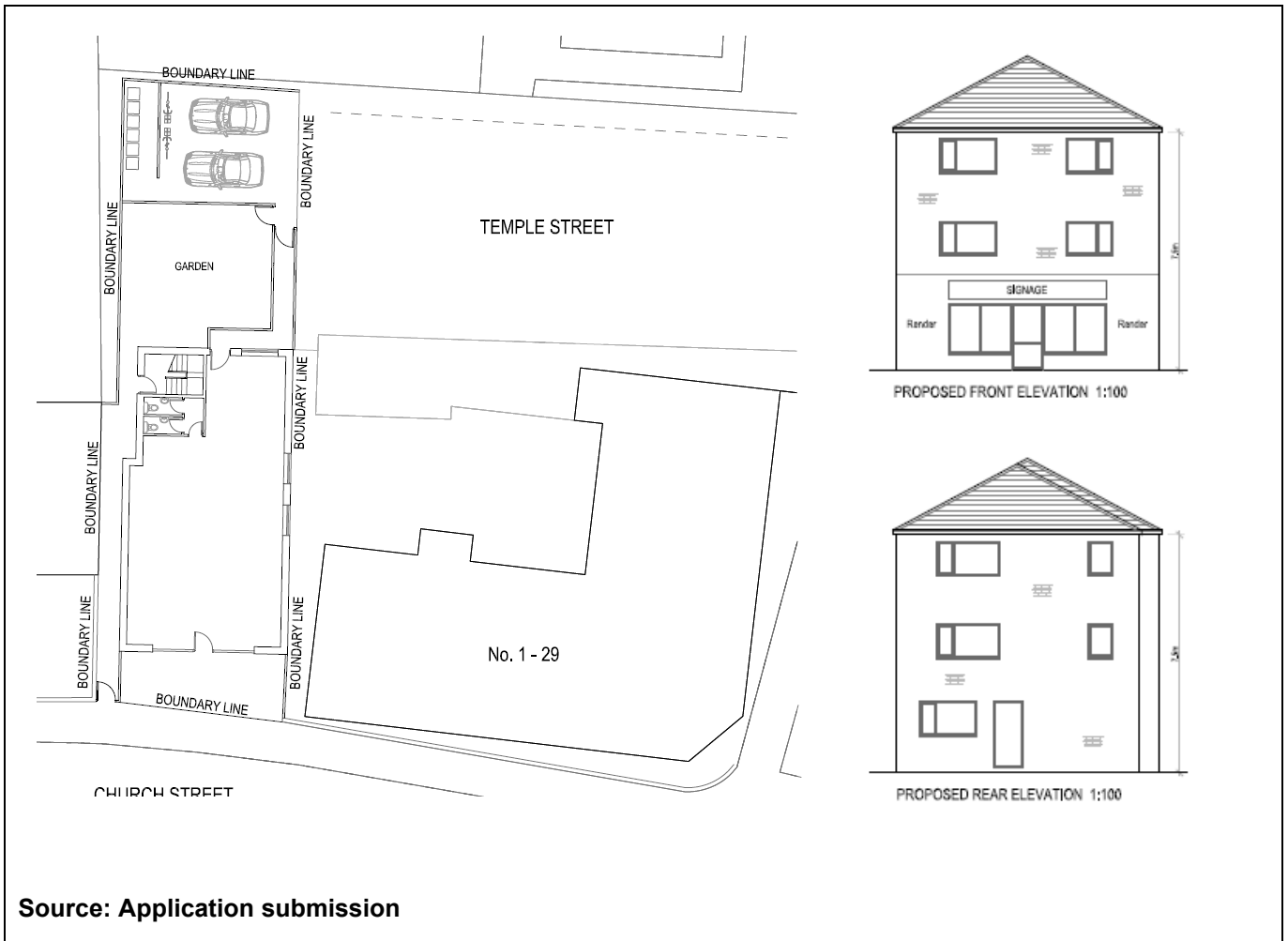
Source: National Design Guide, 2021

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Reason(s) for Consultation

- Building design and materiality

Scheme Image(s)



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
- P1 – Improving Image
- P2 – Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage
- P3 – Improving design of new development
- DMI (General Development Requirements)

Supplementary Planning Documents:

- Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide
- Oldham and Rochdale Residential Design Guide

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

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

Greater Manchester's Streets for All Design Guide

Emerging Planning Policy - Places for Everyone (PfE) joint development plan

SUMMARY

Overall, I am unsupportive of the proposal. The scheme demonstrates a poor standard of design and shows little evidence that the designer has meaningfully engaged with basic urban design principles or the site context.

In its current form, the proposal fails to demonstrate an acceptable level of design quality.

Context and Policy

The immediate built environment (particularly residential stock) around 61 Church Street is characterised by weak, low-quality development. However, national and local policy are clear that degraded context cannot justify further poor design. The Oldham & Rochdale Urban Design Guide states that 'poor designs are unacceptable wherever they may be proposed'. This aligns with the NPPF requirement for new development to improve the character and quality of an area. Given the site's town centre location, there is an opportunity and expectation to raise design quality and positively influence wider placemaking objectives.

Design Policy requires new developments in low-quality environments to set a higher design baseline and contribute positively to character and identity. The Urban Design Guide emphasises that high standards apply across all areas.

Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments: 'will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;'

Policy P3 of the Core Strategy acknowledges that good design will improve the image and attractiveness of the borough as a place to live, work and visit. This policy requires all new developments to adhere to high quality design and enhance the borough's identity and sense of place, by respecting context where it is positive and having regard to the scale, density, massing, height, layout, landscape, materials and access of surrounding buildings and areas in general.

The revisions to the NPPF in July 2021 establish clearly that development which is not well designed should be refused, and conversely, significant weight should be given to development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design. The December 2023 revisions cemented the role of beauty in placemaking and the planning system; in support of this, the Government has produced a suite of guidance documents including Building for a Healthy Life (BHL), the National Model Design Code (NMDC) and the National Design Guide (NDG) which form a material consideration in the assessment of the design of development proposals, and aid Local Authorities and developers alike in understanding if development proposals are well-designed.



What 'red' looks like

- ✗ Using a predetermined sequence of house types to dictate a layout.
- ✗ Attempting to create character through poor replication of architectural features or details.
- ✗ Arranging buildings next to each other in a way that does not create a cohesive street scene.
- ✗ Referencing generic or forgettable development nearby to justify more of the same.

A Memorable Character

Site Analysis and Architectural Response

The proposal shows limited evidence of meaningful site analysis or engagement with appropriate architectural precedents. Instead, it replicates weaker characteristics of nearby buildings.

In the absence of a true design process, it has been assumed the design has used the neighbouring building (St Luke's Place) as the primary source for its contextual response through its application of fenestration and massing.

The neighbouring building to the west has potential for future improvement, and the impact of this proposal should be presented with street elevations and vista

The existing restaurant building has limited merit; however, the proposal repeats the same poor material palette, including render. The use of render has enough precedent in the borough to demonstrate how this has aged poorly and weakened the character of areas. The use of render does not constitute high quality design and will not be supported.

Design / Materiality

Local policy requires design 'which is of a high standard, demonstrating innovation and originality'. In its current guise, the proposal also fails to meet Paragraph 135 of the NPPF. Some more importance and consideration should be given to design. The designer has failed to undertake this exercise with the application very short on any positive design impetus. I would also encourage the designer to draw upon precedents to help inform and improve the architectural design.

Ground Floor

There are no concerns with a higher proportion of glazing to the ground floor although there is now an opportunity to rectify / introduce a high-quality shopfront active frontage which was previously absent. The current proposal for commercial use at ground floor is weakly presented through a shopfront which appears incoherent to the rest of the elevation. The ground floor would

really benefit from being set back to the rest of the elevation, adding much needed depth and interest to a largely dull façade.

Massing

In principle, the proposed building height is considered acceptable. However, it would be beneficial to understand how the development will appear from various points along the highway—for example, the approach from the east where the church spire currently frames a key view. It is also disappointing that the submitted elevations do not illustrate the proposal in context with neighbouring buildings or the wider street scene.

I would ask the planning officer to explore whether the bedroom window on the side elevation achieves an acceptable standard in relation to daylight, privacy, and outlook. Additionally, we need to be confident that the residential amenity of neighbouring properties is not adversely affected, particularly where the proposed massing extends to the rear as shown.

The scheme provides limited outdoor amenity space, and some reduction or refinement of the massing could help mitigate this shortcoming.

A pitched gable roof form would be more appropriate. The main challenge is to avoid replicating features of the adjacent residential building, which itself demonstrates a poor design quality. The inclusion of two hipped roof forms on buildings of this height would further contribute to uncertainty regarding the prevailing architectural character.

Elevation Design

The elevations are flat, undifferentiated, with minimal articulation and limited visual interest. The side elevations are similarly weak, presenting largely blank and unengaging façades. There is also a poor relationship between the masonry and the fenestration.

The Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide advises that, when considering the proportions of new buildings, designers should introduce appropriate vertical and horizontal rhythms to create variety and interest in elevations—whether viewed from a distance or at close range. Brick façades can be enhanced through the use of recesses, projections, and well-considered detailing such as reconstituted or natural stone window and door surrounds.

Opportunity for Positive Town-Centre Impact

Given the site's central location, the development has potential to:

- Support town-centre regeneration aspirations.
- Repair fragmented urban fabric.
- Set a positive precedent for future development.

Without design uplift, there is a risk of further diluting town-centre quality.

Brick

The brick selection is paramount to the scheme and I would suggest a good quality textured brick would go some way in rescuing the weak elements of the design. On the contrary, if a basic, characterless red brick is selected, I would be particularly concerned about the visual amenity and what this represents for development in the town centre. This can be conditioned through a sample panel.

Additional Information Required

- Street elevations / Elevations with further context
- Street views
- Roof Plan

Detail on drawings. Information regarding window reveal depths etc. Generally, an acknowledgement to design importance