

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	24.03.26
Application Reference	PL/2025/1199
Address	Land at Bamford Mews, Off Norden Road, Bamford, OL11 5NX
Proposal	Erection of retirement living community comprising 49 retirement apartments (category 2 type accommodation), associated communal facilities, landscaping and car parking together with 18 retirement bungalows.

Reason(s) for Consultation

Building / Urban design

Scheme Image(s)



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

This list is not exhaustive of the local & national policies and Supplementary Planning Documents that are relevant to the consideration of the planning application.

- Rochdale Borough Unitary Development Plan
- Rochdale Core Strategy policies
- Supplementary Planning Documents:
 - Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide
 - Oldham and Rochdale Residential Design Guide
- The Unitary Development Plan
 - G/BE/1 - Design Quality
 - BE/2 - Design Criteria for New Development

Places for Everyone (PfE) Joint Development Plan

SUMMARY

Overall, the key concerns raised at pre-application remain. Both the bungalows and the retirement apartments require a more tailored architectural approach to avoid feeling formulaic, insufficiently responsive to context, and limited in character or placemaking value.

This current iteration does not satisfy the relevant design policy requirements, and I am unable to support the proposal in its present form.

Policy

Paragraphs 131 and 135 of the NPPF state that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area and are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping, which is largely reflected within Policies DMI and P3 of the Council's adopted Core Strategy, which requires development proposals to demonstrate high quality design.

JPA 17 of PpE requires development to 'achieve excellent design and sustainability through master planning and the use of design codes for the whole site to ensure comprehensive development'.

Pre-App advice

It was advised at the pre-app stage:

'There is an opportunity to undertake a more bespoke approach to the site, particular considering the setting and the designated use for the site. When a design and access statement is submitted as part of the full application, it should demonstrate a well-developed design process that is unique to the site and should consider the advice provided within this consultation.'

A completely different option would have been to pursue a more organic, village-style layout with a strong pedestrian focus and a tighter arrangement of buildings around small squares or courtyards—similar to a retirement village. The client team relayed that they wanted to present a scheme divided between bungalows and a larger residential facility.

In the second set of comments from the urban design team, focused on the bungalows, it was noted that 'removing several bungalow plots would ease pressure on the layout and allow for stronger public and private landscaping.' A diagram was produced to assist the applicant; however, this has not been incorporated, possibly due to the short turnaround between that feedback and the full application submission. This is discussed later in the 'Bungalows' section.

Landscaping

It was relayed that hedgerows and landscaping along the western boundary should be maintained or at least have the reassurance knowing there was a robust strategy in respect to landscaping and habitat protection. There is a further challenge of how these are protected if they end up being placed into private ownership so some clarity was required needed for how this is addressed with the bungalow gardens.

Bungalow layouts

This part of the site feels over-constrained, and removing a small number of plots would greatly improve the overall layout. A more organic arrangement that prioritises greenery and landscape structure is needed.

Plot 1 is one of the first dwellings that are visible on entry to the site so it is important this is welcoming and representative of a high quality design scheme. Instead, frontage parking is dominating the entry into the site. A stronger frontage is required on entry, and in general bungalows that have more than one elevation prominent to the street scene should be double fronted elevations, presenting more visual interest to side or gable elevations. In particular, omitting Plots 1 and 18 would create valuable space for planting along the road edge. See suggestion in image. This would provide a softer, greener outlook for the bungalows opposite replacing blank side elevations with landscaping. This would also enhance the rear outlook for existing neighbouring properties.



Separation distances between Plots 10 /11 to Plots 17 /18 are currently tight, and the layout would function far better with some reorganisation.

Parking

While it is positive that parking does not dominate the frontages, the long runs of timber fencing between properties should be improved; explore options to introduce planting or varied boundary treatments to avoid the appearance of continuous wooden fences.

Whilst tracking exercises have been done, for properties 3 and 13 respectively, is it sensible for senior residents to make such a difficult maneuver? The latter space in fact crosses over Plot 14 front garden completely and this would not constitute high quality design.

Curtilage

Clarification is also required on how trees located within private curtilages will be managed in the long term.

There is also notably limited space for front gardens to most bungalow plots. To aid retirement living, the inclusion of front lawns would certainly improve the quality of the scheme. This could be incorporated with the omission of Plots 1 and 18, allowing the access road to be moved further outward creating an attractive space for landscaping for pedestrians to walk through. This would also allow bungalows to be positioned forward benefitting from larger front and rear gardens. This would also help address concerns with the tight rear garden spaces for Plot 4 and 5.

PFE

The JPA17 allocation calls for larger homes on spacious plots, suggesting a high-value, high-quality development. We would like to see some of these principles carried through to the proposal and there is an opportunity to bring this forward at some of the corner plots, where the current layout is not quite working.

Other

Plot 17 / 18 do not appear in the site plan -please correct.
Elevation design in general discussed later.

Design Approach

The Design and Access Statement presents a generally light level of design context and would have benefited from a more thorough exploration of materiality, architectural detailing and the local character influences that should inform the scheme. The inclusion of aspirational precedents would have strengthened the narrative and clarified the design intent. As it stands, the scheme lacks a robust design approach to fenestration and detailing, and this absence is evident in the elevations of both the apartments and the bungalows, which appear rather flat, generic and visually unengaging. Both tenures currently read as standardised volume prototypes, rather than offering a bespoke response tailored to the site's character, constraints and opportunities. A more comprehensive design exercise is therefore needed to provide a clearer architectural vision and to ensure the development meaningfully reflects and contributes to the distinct qualities of this area.

Whilst the omission of render is welcomed, many of the comments made in the pre-app consultation response remain relevant:

- *‘The design as shown is uninspiring and would not be considered ‘visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping’ (NPPF). The apartment elevations appear quite dated and do not help to elevate design standards. Similarly, the bungalow elevations are weak, with a lack of detail and visual interest shown across the elevations.’*
- *‘Whilst the local context is quite mixed in materials and style, planning policy is clear on not repeating poor quality design if the context is poor. There is a strong opportunity to improve the architectural context and improve design standards across the borough. Policy P1: Developments should improve the image of the area. Poor or unremarkable design that does not elevate the local image or contributes negatively to the streetscape could be rejected.’*
- *‘Improve the organisation of the refuse bin store and mobility store by relocating them to more discreet corner positions, which would reduce visual clutter and improve access.’*
- *‘Draw upon strong architectural precedents to assist. Emphasis should be placed on design details and craftsmanship. A bespoke design approach is crucial to ensure the development meets the ‘high-quality’ standards aforementioned.’*

As mentioned in the pre-app, it was encouraged the applicant draws upon strong architectural precedents to help inform the built design. As a result of this exercise not being undertaken, the design has clearly suffered. Nevertheless, some precedents have been included below – features of the precedents that are positive are described:



Keswick Gardens, Middleton (Extra Care)

This context is much weaker than the site in Bamford. The example shows a positive approach to fenestration, some interest in depth with the gable elevations.



Wooburn Bales, High Wycombe (Retirement Home)

Strong brick type and brick detailing. Roof verge detail is lighter, balcony details are much neater than this proposal. Massing and form of the building as a result is more interesting



Retirement Community, Chigwell by RCKa

Clear sense of attention to architectural detailing, thus adding visual interest and quality to the scheme. This level of detail is not forthcoming in this application.

Apartment Layout

Where the building form shifts, it begins to introduce some much-needed depth and interest. However, these moments are limited and would benefit from being developed further to break down the massing more effectively. In addition, there is a clear need to strengthen the approach to fenestration and architectural detailing.

Improvements to window proportions, hierarchy and arrangement, along with the considered application of brickwork detailing, for example, would significantly enhance the overall quality of the elevations. These elements would help bring richness and articulation that is currently lacking. The examples below illustrate the type of architectural detail and interest we would expect of such a scheme in this context.

The neighbouring facility does however present attractive multi brickwork. Brickwork (and mortar) can be assessed at conditions stage along with other materials, where a suitable built sample panel would be required on site.



The image (right) illustrates the contrast of a weak brick against a brick with visual interest. The projecting bay displays a brick that is uniform, lacking variation and artificial in appearance.

Height / Massing

The immediate context of the care home features a range of roof forms which create noticeable variation across the roofscape. While this variation can at times feel busy, it nonetheless establishes a clear pattern of modulation and complexity in the area. We are not expecting the proposal to replicate this level of variation, and the practicalities of construction are recognised, but there is a need for greater interest and creativity within the proposed roof form. The surrounding area also contains very few examples of a conventional three-storey building (with a full additional roof above); where three-storey elements do appear, they are usually incorporated within the roof, which helps reduce perceived massing and contributes to a more contextually consistent form.

There is an opportunity for the proposal to adapt the traditional three-storey plus roof approach so that it responds more effectively to local character, site topography and its relationship to the nearby care home. The ground rises towards the south-west, which makes the proposed transition from existing two and 2.5 storey development appear more dominant. In this location, integrating the top floor within the roof, or providing a two-storey element, could help moderate the massing, create a more appropriate transition

and add interest to the overall roofscape. Generally, look at how the roof form and height can be addressed to make the massing look less dominant.



Different roof forms should be reinterpreted to introduce architectural interest and help break down the massing of an otherwise simple, monotonous three-storey building with a roof. Precedents: Chapter House | Proctor Matthews Wycliffe Park | PRP

The architectural detailing would benefit from further development, as it currently does little to strengthen the building's form and massing. Opportunities to enhance visual interest through brick detailing and more considered window design have not yet been fully explored, and the two-tone brick approach alone is not sufficient to achieve this. The side elevations would also benefit from additional refinement, particularly in light of the earlier pre-app advice to engage with the BHL guidance.

Balcony detailing could be improved; the proposed steel frame system feels somewhat heavy and dated, and further information on the Juliet balconies would help clarify the overall approach. As it stands, the scheme does not yet convey the level of refinement expected of a high-quality design. Both the apartments and bungalows would benefit from stronger character-defining elements, as they currently appear quite uniform and not fully reflective of the aspirations for a high-value area.

