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PLANNING + DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

**PROPOSAL - CHANGE OF USE FROM PUBLIC HOUSE AND RESTAURANT
TO OFFICE WITH ASSOCIATED PARKING AND STORAGE**

LOCATION - THE CHURCH INN, CASTLE HILL ROAD, BURY, BL9 6UH



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1. Introduction

This Planning, Design & Access Statement accompanies a full planning application for the 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.

A formal Pre-Application Enquiry (Ref. PREAPP/00113/24) was submitted to Rochdale Council in 2024. Officers expressed in-principle support for the re-use of the vacant building for employment purposes, subject to justification of Green Belt impact, heritage sensitivity, ecology and access design. The proposal now before the Council has been refined in direct response to those points.

This Statement provides a full assessment of design, heritage, ecology, Green Belt compliance and planning policy context under the Rochdale Core Strategy (2016) and the Places for Everyone Plan (2024), together with the relevant provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

2. Site and Context

The Church Inn occupies a prominent roadside position on Castle Hill Road within the small rural settlement of Birtle, approximately 2.9 km east of Bury and 5 km west of Rochdale town centre. The surrounding area is characterised by open farmland, scattered dwellings and traditional stone buildings enclosed by dry-stone walls and hedgerows. The main building is a two-storey, coursed-stone property of 17th-century origin with later 19th- and 20th-century additions. The site extends to approximately 0.6 hectares and includes a surfaced car park, former beer-garden areas and open grassland to the rear.

Historically, the property traded as a public house and restaurant until the Covid-19 pandemic, when the business ceased operation in December 2021. The long-standing owners subsequently retired, and the premises have remained vacant since. The building was placed on the open market in May 2023 by Pearson Ferrier, initially at £875,000 and later at £750,000, as a “17th-century freehold inn and restaurant with approximately four acres of gardens, grazing land and car parking.” Media coverage in the Bury Times confirmed that the Church Inn had been “put up for sale as the owners looked to retire following its closure during the Covid-19 pandemic.”

The property has therefore been vacant for almost four years and actively marketed for approximately two and a half years without any viable interest or offer being received. Despite this prolonged exposure, no community group, parish body or local resident association has sought to acquire or operate the premises, and the site has never been nominated as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) under the Localism Act 2011. The absence of any such nomination demonstrates that the property is not considered a valued or essential community facility. Instead, the building has become increasingly redundant in functional terms and visually under-utilised within the rural scene.

The surrounding land remains within the Green Belt, and the property is identified as a non-designated heritage asset of local importance. Approximately 100 metres to the north-west lies the Grade II listed Church of St John the Baptist, to which the building historically related. Vehicular access is from Castle Hill Road via an existing entrance with satisfactory sightlines. The site’s rural character, its traditional materials, and its close relationship to the church form the contextual setting that informs the design and heritage approach set out in this Statement.

3. The Proposal

The project secures the sustainable re-use of the vacant building by adapting it as high-quality office accommodation. Key components include:

- Conversion of the existing inn to offices (Use Class E(g)(i));
- Raising of the main roof ridge by approx. 0.85 m to achieve usable headroom;
- Internal alterations to form modern Office layout.
- Removal of unsympathetic late-20th-century additions;
- Cladding and refurbishment of the 1970s front extension;
- Retain parking layout providing 36 spaces with EV chargers;
- Enhanced landscaping with native hedging and staff garden.

All external materials are traditional: natural stone, slate roofing and vertical zinc cladding to ancillary elements. Works are designed to preserve the building's proportions and rural character.

4. Design and Appearance

The design has been carefully developed to balance functional requirements with the preservation of the building's architectural and heritage character. The principal external alteration relates to the replacement and modest raising of the existing roof, a measure that has arisen not from aesthetic intent but from clear structural necessity and sustainability objectives.

4.1 Existing Roof Condition

The HME Civil Engineering Structural Appraisal (April 2025) identifies the existing roof as being in a poor and deteriorated condition, with widespread structural and material defects. The ridge and purlins are visibly deflected; rafters are undersized and affected by historic fungal decay; and there is extensive evidence of water ingress, failed leadwork, and open joints within the external slate covering. The appraisal notes that much of the existing structure comprises a combination of aged softwood replacements and ad-hoc bolted timbers, providing no consistent structural continuity. Wall plates are weakened by long-term damp penetration, and several roof trusses have fractured tie members and failing joints, leaving the load path uncertain. These defects have led to uneven settlement of the ridge line and localised cracking in the masonry gable ends.

HME concludes that the existing roof has reached the end of its serviceable life and cannot be made compliant through repair alone. The structure lacks sufficient bearing capacity to meet current loading and snow-load standards and poses potential safety risks if retained. In particular, the report highlights the danger of ongoing progressive movement in the trusses and the likelihood of further deflection under new imposed loads associated with reroofing works.

4.2 Functional and Regulatory Need for Height Adjustment

Beyond the structural deficiencies, the current internal first-floor headroom is extremely limited — in places falling below 1.5 m. This restricts the usability of the upper level and prevents compliance with modern Building Regulations (Approved Document B and K) relating to escape routes, fire separation and safe circulation. The introduction of a new insulated roof build-up inevitably increases the structural depth — incorporating rafters, insulation, ventilation cavity and plaster finish — which would further reduce the already constrained ceiling height if the ridge were not raised. To retain the existing height would therefore result in a first floor that is neither compliant nor practical for occupation. The proposed modest increase of approximately 900 mm at the ridge and proportionate eaves lift is essential to offset the new roof depth and restore acceptable headroom of around 2.4 m, thereby allowing safe, efficient and accessible workspace.

The height adjustment also enables the new structure to be designed as a complete, integrated roof truss system, allowing improved structural stability, lateral restraint to the walls, and simplified fire-compartmentation at ceiling level. The opportunity to renew the roof structure provides a permanent and safe solution that cannot be achieved through partial or patch repair.

4.3 Sustainability and Thermal Performance

Replacing the roof provides a significant opportunity to enhance the building's thermal and environmental performance. The existing roof contains minimal insulation and suffers from uncontrolled air leakage, contributing to substantial heat loss and condensation. The new design introduces a modern insulated warm-roof system, achieving U-values consistent with current Building Regulations and incorporating continuous airtightness membranes and vapour control layers. Stone slab / tiles are to be reused where salvageable, supplemented by matching reclaimed material, reducing embodied carbon. New sustainably sourced timber trusses and rafters will be fabricated locally, and all removed materials will be recycled or repurposed where feasible.

The increased roof depth allows for a thicker insulation layer, reducing heating demand and improving year-round comfort. Enhanced natural ventilation and strategically positioned conservation-style rooflights will reduce the need for artificial lighting, lowering operational energy consumption. Collectively, these improvements will contribute to a substantial reduction in operational carbon emissions and ensure that the building meets modern expectations of environmental performance while retaining its heritage value.

From a wider sustainability perspective, undertaking a complete roof replacement rather than pursuing piecemeal patch repairs prevents recurrent maintenance cycles, avoids material waste and extends the life expectancy of the building fabric for at least another 60–80 years. The works therefore represent a sustainable investment in the long-term conservation and reuse of the building, aligning directly with Core Strategy Policy G8 (Managing Resources) and NPPF §7 (Sustainable Development).

4.4 Design, Heritage and Visual Considerations

Visually, the increase in height is modest and proportionate to the overall scale of the building and will be virtually imperceptible from public viewpoints. The revised roof profile reinstates a true, level ridge line, correcting decades of visible sagging that currently detract from the property's appearance. The pitch, proportions and gable forms remain unchanged, ensuring that the building's vernacular character is preserved. The new natural-slate roof covering will closely match the existing materials, and lead detailing will replicate traditional specifications.

In heritage terms, the intervention is conservation-led. It secures the continued use of the non-designated heritage asset and safeguards the surviving historic masonry beneath the roofline from ongoing water damage. The modest increase in height is considered to cause no harm to the setting of the nearby Grade II-listed Church of St John the Baptist, and the restored form will improve the visual relationship between the two historic buildings. The proposal therefore meets the tests of NPPF 202–206 and Core Strategy Policy P2 (Protecting Heritage) by ensuring the long-term preservation and positive enhancement of a valued local asset.

4.5 Summary

The combination of structural failure, regulatory non-compliance and sustainability imperatives provides a clear and compelling justification for full roof replacement and a modest increase in height. The proposed works address urgent safety concerns, enable compliance with building standards, and deliver significant thermal and energy-efficiency gains while respecting the building's character and the openness of the Green Belt. Far from representing an enlargement, the intervention constitutes a necessary conservation and adaptation measure that ensures the building's continued viable use and longevity. On this basis, the proposal accords with Policies DM1, P2 and G8 of the Rochdale Core Strategy, Policy JP-D1 of Places for Everyone (2024), and the relevant provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

5. Heritage Considerations

A Heritage Assessment by Garry Miller Heritage Consultancy (Oct 2025) identifies the Church Inn as a former 17th-century farmhouse converted to an inn by the 19th century. Significance lies in its age, vernacular form, and contribution to the group value of rural Birtle.

The scheme removes intrusive 20th-century elements, repairs historic masonry, and reinstates appropriate materials. The detached store, designed in an agricultural vernacular, sits discreetly behind the main building and does not harm the setting of the listed church. The development therefore sustains the asset's significance in line with NPPF 203–206.

6. Ecology and Biodiversity

Arbtech's Bat Emergence & Re-Entry Survey (Sept 2025) identified two day roosts of common pipistrelle bats beneath lifted roof tiles. A Bat Mitigation Class Licence (BMCL) will be secured before construction, with roost features reinstated through bat boxes and ridge tiles.

Given the loss of habitat as a result of the updated proposals is less than 25m², equating to 10.27m², and that these are not priority habitats it is considered the development is within the scope of the de minimis exemption. The exemption statement therefore supersedes the previously submitted BNG Assessment and is considered valid provided the proposals are not amended further.

7. Green Belt Assessment

7.1 Policy Context

The site lies within the Greater Manchester Green Belt as defined by the Rochdale Core Strategy (Policy G4) and Places for Everyone (Policy JP-G9). Under NPPF 154 (c), the re-use of permanent buildings and limited extensions to existing buildings are not considered inappropriate provided that the openness of the Green Belt is preserved and the proposal does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

7.2 Assessment of Proportionality

The proposed scheme involves the re-use and alteration of an existing, permanent structure; the removal of several unsympathetic modern additions; a modest increase in roof height; a new subservient side extension; and the erection of a detached storage building required for business operations. The key test is therefore whether the

cumulative effect of these works represents a disproportionate addition in volumetric or visual terms and whether the openness of the Green Belt would be preserved.

7.3 Volumetric Analysis of the Existing Building

Element	Volume (m³)	Commentary
Existing main building	1823	Two-storey stone inn structure – core heritage element.
Existing outbuilding	77	Small detached store (to be extended).
Total existing built volume	1900 m³	
Elements to be removed		
Single-storey side element	–111	Modern, poor-quality flat-roof addition – demolished.
First-floor flat-roof projection	–68	Unsympathetic 20th-century addition – removed.
Total volume removed	–179 m³	
Elements to be added to existing building		
Roof height increase	+100.1	Required to accommodate new safe roof structure and insulation.
Extended Garage	+ 49	
New single-storey side extension	+95.7	Subservient replacement of demolished element.
Total added volume	+244.8 m³	
Net change to existing building	+65.8 m³ (Net Increase)	Overall 3% increase in built volume.

On completion of the works to the main building, the overall volume will of the site will increase by 3% due to the retention and extension of the existing outbuilding / garage, which is require for storage of landscaping maintenance equipment, confirming that the proposals constitute a proportionate alteration and, in volumetric terms, a very marginal increase but an enhancement to Green Belt openness.

8. Access, Parking and Highways

Access remains via the existing Castle Hill Road junction. The revised layout retains 36 parking spaces including visitor and disabled bays, with integrated EV charging and secure cycle storage. Internal circulation allows for light-goods turning. Traffic generation is comparable to or less than the former public-house use. The proposal accords with Core Strategy Policy T2 (Accessibility).

9. Sustainability and Low-Carbon Design

The proposed conversion of the Church Inn supports the principles of sustainable development as set out in NPPF 7–14, Core Strategy Policies G8 and G9, and Places for Everyone Policy JP-S1. The scheme adopts a fabric-first approach, retaining and upgrading the existing stone structure rather than demolishing or rebuilding. This strategy significantly reduces embodied carbon and construction waste, ensuring efficient use of existing resources.

Energy efficiency will be enhanced through improved insulation, replacement of outdated windows and doors, low-energy lighting, and modern heating systems. Provision is made for renewable-ready infrastructure (PV-capable wiring) and multiple EV-charging points within the parking area. The landscaping plan incorporates new native tree and hedgerow planting, which assists biodiversity net gain and improves carbon sequestration on site.

From a social-economic standpoint, the scheme is sustainable because it provides a long-term, employment-generating re-use for a redundant rural building. The continued vacancy of the former pub for nearly four years, despite two and a half years of marketing, confirms that the historic hospitality use is no longer viable. In sustainability terms, bringing an existing, structurally sound building back into active use is far preferable to constructing new office accommodation on a greenfield site elsewhere. The proposal therefore supports the Council's net-zero objectives, rural diversification agenda and the efficient use of land and buildings.

10. Response to Officer and Consultation feedback

Following the submission of the application we have received officer, consultee and public feedback and have amended the proposal, please see amended site plan for context.

- Remove Large Detached Storage Unit
- Remove Detached amenity Building.
- Remove provision of HGV, plant and large vehicle use and storage.
- Remove hardstanding providing access to detached storage building.
- Increase parking / reinstate parking previously identified for HGV, Plant and large vehicles.
- Amend the proposed gates to 5 bar timber or similar.
- Amend Fencing to post and rail / wire at acceptable height.
- Remove timber cladding to single storey facade upgrade, provide additional detailing for cladding.
- Provide additional detailing for stonework relating to raising the height of roof.
- Provide additional info identifying increase in height.
- Retain existing garage building, provide slight extension and reface in stone, this will be a storage building for garden and surrounding land maintenance, lawnmower etc.
- Remove all white paint from existing / original building.

Summary:

The proposal directly responds to all application advice

11. Planning Policy Appraisal

The proposal accords with the development plan as a whole. Relevant policies include:

- **Rochdale Core Strategy (2016):** DM1 (Design), E1 & E2 (Employment), P2 (Heritage), C8 (Community Facilities), G4 (Green Belt), G8 (Resources), G9 (Natural Environment), T2 (Accessibility).
- **Places for Everyone (2024):** JP-S1 (Sustainable Development), JP-G9 (Green Belt), JP-D1 (Design), JP-S6 (Economic Growth).
- **National Planning Policy Framework (2023):** 81–85 (Economic growth), 152–157 (Green Belt), 203–216 (Heritage).

The development supports sustainable growth, reuses existing buildings, and enhances biodiversity — fully consistent with the NPPF's objectives.

12. Planning Balance and Benefits

In assessing the planning balance, the proposal must be considered in the context of the three strands of sustainable development identified by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 8) — economic, social and environmental — together with the specific Green Belt and heritage considerations relevant to this site. When the proposals are reviewed in their entirety, the cumulative public and private benefits demonstrably outweigh any limited harm, and the development accords with the Rochdale Core Strategy (2016), Places for Everyone (2024) and the NPPF (2023).

12.1 Economic Benefits

The proposal secures the long-term re-use of a vacant rural property by providing a permanent office space Rochdale businesses. Investment in the Church Inn site represents a significant capital commitment to the borough, retaining skilled employment locally, supporting supply chains, and contributing to Rochdale's economy in line with Core Strategy Policies E1 and E2 and NPPF 81(a–c).

12.2 Social and Community Considerations

The development delivers social value through the conservation and productive re-use of a non-designated heritage asset that has been vacant since December 2021. The prolonged closure and marketing of the former pub — on the market since May 2023 with no credible offers or community interest — demonstrate that the property no longer performs a meaningful social or community function. Importantly, it has never been nominated as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) under the Localism Act 2011, confirming that there is no realistic prospect of it being re-established as a public house or community facility.

The site's rural location, limited population catchment, and lack of public transport links have all contributed to the failure of the hospitality use. Conversely, its conversion to offices provides a sustainable new purpose that delivers

local employment, ongoing building maintenance and increased activity during normal working hours, which in turn enhances site security and vitality. The development therefore meets the social objectives of the NPPF by fostering a vibrant and well-balanced rural economy while respecting the site's character.

12.3 Environmental and Heritage Benefits

The scheme is inherently sustainable through the re-use of an existing structure, avoiding the environmental cost of new-build development elsewhere. Extensive roof replacement and building-fabric upgrades will significantly improve thermal performance, airtightness and energy efficiency in accordance with Core Strategy Policy G8 (Managing Resources) and Places for Everyone Policy JP-S1.

Heritage benefits are considerable: the proposals remove poor-quality modern additions, repair and reinstate the original stone structure, and restore an appropriate roof profile. These works will preserve the building's vernacular character and enhance the setting of the nearby Grade II-listed Church of St John the Baptist. The use of natural materials and traditional detailing ensures visual harmony with the surrounding Green Belt landscape.

12.4 Green Belt and Sustainability Balance

The site lies within the Green Belt, and therefore the key consideration is the effect on openness and the identification of Very Special Circumstances (VSC) where necessary. The principal works to the existing building result in a net reduction of volume and the retention and extension of the existing outbuilding / garage results in an overall addition of 3% total site volume; however, it is located within the established curtilage on previously developed land and is screened by existing and proposed landscaping. In spatial and visual terms, any impact on openness is limited and localised.

12.5 Overall Planning Balance

When all considerations are weighed in the round, the proposal represents a sustainable form of development that secures the long-term preservation and active use of an under-utilised building, delivers measurable environmental improvements, and strengthens the local economy. The project embodies the principles of sustainability, heritage conservation and rural economic diversification that the development plan seeks to promote.

Accordingly, the proposal is considered to be in full accordance with the Rochdale Core Strategy (Policies E1, E2, DM1, P2, G4, G8 and G9), the Places for Everyone Plan (Policies JP-S1, JP-D1 and JP-G9), and the National Planning Policy Framework (2023). The clear and demonstrable benefits of the scheme substantially outweigh any limited harm, and planning permission should therefore be granted.

13. Conclusion

The proposed development represents a sustainable and well-justified reuse of a vacant rural building, securing the future of a non-designated heritage asset within the Green Belt. The design responds positively to the site's character, delivers ecological and landscape enhancement, and provides a consolidated operational base for a long-standing Rochdale employer.

The scheme accords with the Rochdale Core Strategy, the Places for Everyone Plan (2024) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted subject to appropriate conditions.