

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	13.04.26
Application Reference	PL/2026/0141
Address	Land at Queens Drive, Kirkholt, Rochdale, OL11 2NP
Proposal	Erection of 3-storey apartment building of consisting 23no. units, erection of 5no. 3-storey dwelling houses, erection of a new sub-station with associated access, car parking, landscaping and boundary treatment

Reason(s) for Consultation

Building / Urban design

Scheme Image(s)



Source: Application submission

Assessment

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

Greater Manchester's Streets for All Design Guide
Places for Everyone (PfE) Joint Development Plan

SUMMARY

The submitted scheme demonstrates a clear and coherent design intent, and the overarching design strategy is broadly supported. However, greater clarity is required in several key areas, and several design refinements are strongly encouraged, particularly in relation to softening the entrance and arrival experience. Subject to these matters being satisfactorily addressed, I would be supportive of the scheme, which accords with design policy and has clear potential to enhance the quality of the built environment across the borough.

Materials should be secured by condition.

Re-consultation should be undertaken as appropriate.

Massing / Scale

The proposed 3-storey height is considered appropriate within its context, having regard to the scale of surrounding buildings and residential dwellings, as well as the massing and layout of the previously demolished apartment buildings on the site. Three-storey forms are a common and suitable typology in the area. Previous advice highlighted that larger and deeper three-storey blocks should be carefully designed to avoid appearing overly dominant or inconsistent with adjoining development. In response, the scheme breaks down the massing, moving away from a single, typical four-sided block to achieve a more articulated form.

Layout / Orientation

The orientation of the blocks has been appropriately addressed, with the scheme partially maintaining the alignment of the former buildings on the site. When read alongside the open green space, the rotation of the apartment block by 90 degrees does not appear incongruous; rather it presents a logical and coherent response to the site layout.

The inclusion of a central green space is welcomed, as it opens up the site and introduces active frontages, natural surveillance and activity through an improved public realm. Parking is appropriately removed from primary frontages and elevations, resulting in a more visually pleasing approach and allowing for uninterrupted views across the landscaped areas.

However, there are concerns regarding site access. The current approach does not demonstrate a high-quality design response and detracts from the overall scheme, as the substation and associated car parking unduly dominate the arrival experience. The layout should be reconsidered, or a stronger visual buffer introduced, to improve first impressions and reinforce a clearer visual relationship with the site.

Whilst a centralised landscaped space is supported in principle, some caution is advised to ensure there is sufficient usable green space for residents, including opportunities for informal play. An over proliferation of tree planting (in the centre) could limit the flexibility of the space for communal activities, although the overall principle of integrating planting and trees within the scheme is supported.

The use of the gable form has been suitably justified. While my pre-application response identified a number of weaknesses in the earlier design, this iterative process has clearly allowed for a re-evaluation of the scheme. The architects are commended for a clear and logical design statement that sets out the evolution of the proposals and helps to explain the design and layout choices made. In particular, the previously unresolved gable form has now been convincingly addressed.

Building Design

The townhouses read more coherently than the apartment blocks, which is natural given this is a more considerate massing block and form. A regularity and cohesiveness elements from this elevation can be better incorporated to the apartment block.

Apartment Blocks

The elevation design would benefit from drawing on aspects of the townhouse design approach. The introduction of vertical niches and sensitive placement of rainwater pipes would help establish a more unified cohesion with the overall design language.



While the use of spandrel panels would normally be discouraged, their limited application within a recessed zone allows them to read as a feature glazed element and is therefore considered acceptable.

Entrance

The recessed portion of the elevation does let the overall elevation down. Despite the constraints of the roof articulation, the entrance remains uninspiring, and rainwater goods could be better integrated. A more considered and expressive treatment of the entrance would help align this area with the stronger design language evident elsewhere in the development.



Gable Detail

Elevation B is a key and highly prominent elevation, effectively forming the public face of the development. As such, it is important that this elevation is resolved as strongly as possible. I acknowledge the architect's attempt to avoid what could otherwise read as a blank or monolithic façade. However, further clarity is required regarding the depth of the brick recess to fully understand the effectiveness of this approach and whether sufficient visual interest is achieved across the elevation.. Introducing restrained brick detailing at the gable could help strengthen the composition. Relevant precedents are attached for reference.



PV Panels

Acknowledging the inclusion of PV panels, there is a risk that these could visually dominate the elevations if not carefully treated. They should therefore be concealed as far as possible, with recessing them within the roof plane, using a slim profile or integrated roof tile system representing the preferred approach.

Bin Store / Substation

The continuation of brickwork and associated detailing to elements such as the bin store is a positive indicator of design quality, and this approach would be equally effective if extended to the substation, helping ensure these ancillary structures are well integrated within the overall development.

Materials

A key improvement would be to soften the anthracite colour/ finish by adopting a lighter tone. Anthracite is used extensively across the borough with mixed results, and given the proposal for uPVC frames and balcony railings, a lighter colour would reduce the visual dominance typically associated with darker greys.

The design intent for brickwork is suitable at this stage, but I would ask the planning officer to condition this on the viewing of a built sample which includes mortar and demonstration of the detailed recessed brickwork. The sample should be able to be viewed a sample of the window frames, balcony material and roof tiles.

Design Clarifications

There is a clear design intent evident within the submitted drawings; however, further clarity and resolution of the detailed design are required to ensure this intent is successfully realised.

- Further detail /information regarding brick details.
What is the brick recess depth denoted by item 3 on the elevations?
- Provide more detail for the rainwater goods– is this a recessed niche in the brickwork -provide width and depth.
- What is the window reveal depth at windows / doors?
- Can the planning officer ensure privacy is not compromised for residents in the townhouses i.e. residents out on balconies in the apartments
- View on entrance to the site (to the townhouses car park) would be helpful. Show how concerns with this arrival space have been addressed.

Also, provide:

- Confirmation on the brick boundary wall detail to the townhouses - if capping is used as shown in the CGI this is advised against, and the use of stone would be recommended instead.
- Are three bricktypes being proposed because the visuals suggest the upper brick parts differ for the townhouses and apartments but the key does not.

