

APPLICATION NUMBER: 25/00705/LBC

DELEGATED DECISION CHECKLIST AND REPORT

APPLICATION NO.
25/00705/LBC

CASE OFFICER
Michael Atkinson-Smith

DETERMINATION DATE 03.09.2025 **EXT OF TIME** 12.09.2025

Address: St Chads Church Steps Off Nelson Street, Rochdale OL16 1NJ

Proposal: Refurbishment and repair of the steps, walls and handrails including replacement of the lighting.

PUBLICITY	Weekly list expired?	Y	Site notice expired?	Y
	Neighbour letters expired?	Y	Press Notice expired?	Y

DELEGATION	Significant departure from local plan?	N	Contrary to national policy?	N
	Applicant a Council Member or officer?	N	Contrary to previous decision?	N
	Major with 10 or more objections and recommending approval?	N	Called in or Planning Panel objection?	N

COMMENTS	Planning Panel comments received?	N
	Neighbour comments received?	N

EIA	Screening opinion completed and saved to Onbase?	N/A
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CONDITIONS	Pre-commencement conditions proposed?	N
	Pre-commencement conditions agreed (or notification period expired)?	N/A

RECOMMENDATION	GRANT Subject to Conditions
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CHECKED AND SIGNED OFF BY: RK

DATE: 01/10/2025

SITE

The application relates to the steps leading from Packer Street to the Rochdale Parish Church of St Chad in Rochdale Town Centre.

Originally there were 33 steps dating from the twelfth century, although in 1660 the stairway was extended to include 122 steps using stone quarried from Blackstone. The majority of the lower section of the steps are not nationally listed, although they are included on the local list of non-designated heritage assets and run through the Broadfield Park slopes, which form part of the wider Grade II registered park & garden. The upper portion of the steps run into the grounds of the Church of St Chad, which is listed on the National Heritage List for England at Grade II*. The retaining wall lining the upper portion of the steps forms part of the curtilage of the Church of St Chad and is therefore curtilage listed, hence the requirement for Listed Building Consent for the works.

The official listing description for the Church of St Chad reads as:

Church. Tower C13 and later, top stage added in 1870. Nave arcade columns partly C14, arches in south aisle C14, clerestory 1557, chancel and chapel 1883-8, otherwise of various Victorian restorations. South aisle, porch and belfry by W.H. Crossland, chancel and chapels by J.S. Crowther. Rossendale stone, Yorkshire stone and slate and copper roofs. Nave with aisles, clerestory, central west tower and south porch. Chancel with chapels to north and south. Largely in a Decorated style. Castellated 5-bay nave and aisle with square headed 3-light cusped windows and 3- light traceried windows to aisle in mixed style with hood moulds. Weathered buttresses and crocketed pinnacles. South porch has diagonal weathered buttresses, grotesque gargoyles, crocketed pinnacles, statue of St. Chad and arched opening with heavily enriched ogee shaped surround. The 3-stage castellated tower has offset angle buttresses surmounted by carved heads and decorative pinnacles, elaborate bell-stage, gargoyles and crocketed pinnacles. The 6-bay castellated chancel has clerestory and side chapels with square-headed traceried clerestory lights and 3-light, four-centred arches to chapel with Perpendicular tracery. Buttresses and pinnacles as above but with grotesque gargoyles. The chancel roof is higher than that of the nave, the east window is of 6-lights with Perpendicular tracery. Interior: 6-bay nave arcade with alternating round and octagonal piers with stiff-leaf and upright-leaf and headed capitals, and some with broaches at the springing of the arches. The arches are double chamfered and the roof of an ornate tie-beam construction. The chancel is also of 6 bays with clustered columns. Fittings: plain C14 font, some Perpendicular stalls and chapel screens, C17 twisted-baluster communion rail in south chapel. W. Morris west window 1872-4, A.S. Wild, Top o'th'Steps, 1970 and B.o.E.

The Church stands on higher ground than the nearby Grade I listed Rochdale Town Hall and is situated in the heart of the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area's Civic Quarter character area, which includes the newly laid Rochdale Town Hall Square, the Rochdale Memorial Gardens, The Esplanade and parts of Broadfield Park (registered at Grade II). The Grade II listed Market Cross stands to the north of Packer Spout and lies within the setting of the Church Steps. The locally listed Flying Horse Hotel Public House and the Empire Hall lie within the setting of the steps.

In recent years, the steps have become damaged and overgrown during the period in which they have been closed off the public to safely facilitate the laying of Town Hall Square, the restoration of Rochdale Town Hall and the remodelling of Broadfield Slopes. Movement of the stone steps has made them unsafe to reopen without a programme of remedial work.

PROPOSAL

Listed Building Consent is sought for the restoration of the church steps and the walls lining them. Whilst not all of the structure is listed, the upper part of the steps are surrounded by curtilage listed retaining walls of the Church of St Chad and the total structure is therefore considered in the consideration of this application.

The proposed works to restore the steps are set out as follows:

- ☐ Patch repair and reconstruct retaining walls as required;
- ☐ Carefully lift the existing steps to improve the base, before re-laying the steps to be more level and secure. No new stonework is to be installed and the new bedding shall be formed of lime mortar;
- ☐ Replace the existing handrails with new to match the original utilising new brackets fitted into the existing leaded holes in the pad stones. The handrails will be raised in height to more closely meet current regulations as they are currently set very low; and
- ☐ Replacement of the existing lighting columns running up the sides of the retaining walls, utilising a traditional black cast iron lantern design as opposed to the more modern street lighting currently installed. This element does not require Listed Building Consent but is included here for completeness.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 (as amended)

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Places for Everyone joint development plan (PFE)

Places for People

JP-P1: Sustainable Places
JP-P2: Heritage

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

SO3	Improving design, image and quality of place
P1	Improving image
P2	Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage
P3	Improving design of new development
SD1	Delivering sustainable development
DM1	General development requirements

Unitary Development Plan (UDP):

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

N/A

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Conservation and Design – N/A. Application processed by Conservation & Design team.

Historic England - Do not wish to comment. Recommend seeking the views of the Council's specialist conservation and archaeological advisers.

Joint Committee of National Amenity Societies – Do not wish to comment.

REPRESENTATIONS

Letters of notification were sent to surrounding neighbours, a site notice displayed in the vicinity site and an advertisement placed in the local press. No representations have been received.

ANALYSIS

Principle of Development and Heritage Impacts

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) states that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Similarly, Section 72 requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas.

The proposed restoration works to the Church steps can be considered as a necessary intervention to make them safe prior to their reopening to the public as the wider Town Hall, Town Hall Square and Broadfield Slopes restoration projects come to their conclusion. The proposed works will ensure the longevity of the steps for the benefit of current and future generations, whilst resulting in an increased level of safety for users.

It is noted that the steps and side walls can be considered to have a high heritage significance rating given their significant age and impact on the character and appearance of the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area and the setting of the Grade I listed Rochdale Town Hall, Grade II* listed Rochdale Parish Church of St Chad, Grade II listed Market Cross and the locally listed Flying Horse Hotel Public House and Empire Hall. The works to restore the steps would go a significant way to meeting the broad objectives of the recently adopted Rochdale Town Centre Management Plan to improve and enhance the resident & visitor experience, whilst preserving and celebrating the town's rich heritage.

The works to relay the stone steps on a lime mortar bed are considered to result in a positive benefit given that the works would ensure the longevity of the steps whilst ensuring they are safe and accessible for users. A condition has been recommended requiring full details of the repairs methodology, to include the lime

mortar mix and cataloguing method to ensure the steps are safely stored and replaced in their original positions.

Similarly, the works to the side walls including the retaining sections running into the grounds of the Church of St Chad are considered to be wholly appropriate. Again, a fully detailed repairs methodology supported by annotated photography, method of cataloguing and lime mortar mix to match as closely as possible the existing mortar (weighted for weathering) is recommended to be secured through condition. A further condition is recommended requiring that any new stones required to be brought in to replaced damaged stones are to match the existing stonework as closely as possible.

In respect of the replacement handrails, it is proposed that these would be replaced like for like with new installations. Whilst it is noted that this would result in the loss of aged fabric, the handrails can be considered to be of low heritage significance overall and there would be a clear public benefit in replacing the handrails in a higher position to meet modern regulatory standards for public safety and accessibility. It is noted that the replacement brackets would be fitted to the existing leaded holes in the pad stones which would ensure that there would no additional damage to the original stonework.

On this basis, it is therefore considered that subject to the suggested conditions the proposed development would comply with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P2, adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policies DM1, P1, P2, P3 & DM1 and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other matters

The replacement of the lighting columns is not subject to Listed Building Consent. However, an informative has been applied to remind the applicant of their obligations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in respect of protected species, namely bats, which may be affected by the replacement lighting design.

Similarly, as the application is not an application for planning permission, an informative has been included reminding the applicant of their obligations under the same Act in respect of invasive species which may have taken hold on the steps during their period of closure to the public.

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT subject to the following conditions:

1. This development hereby consented shall not be carried out otherwise than in accordance with the following approved plans:
 - A1/2005406/01 Location Plan
 - S25711-GF-01 (Steps Layout)
 - S2577-EL 01-16 (Steps Elevations)

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory standard of development in accordance with the policies contained within the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, the saved Rochdale Unitary Development Plan, the Planning

(Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act (1990) and the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. No works to replace the stone steps shall be undertaken until such time as a fully detailed repair methodology and specification to include details of the lime mortar bedding mix cataloguing method have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory standard of development and to ensure the steps are safely stored and replaced in their original positions in accordance with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P2, adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policies DM1, P1, P2, P3 & DM1 and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. No works to the side walls shall take place until such time as a fully detailed repairs methodology supported by annotated photography has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The lime mortar specification shall be in accordance with the details shown on supporting document ref. 2004647-004 NBS Specification.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory standard of development and to ensure stones are replaced in their original positions in accordance with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P2, adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policies DM1, P1, P2, P3 & DM1 and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

4. Any new stones required to repair the side walls shall match as closely as possible the existing stones in colour, texture, size and provenance.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory standard of in accordance with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P2, adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policies DM1, P1, P2, P3 & DM1 and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

INFORMATIVES:

Protected Species

The applicant is reminded of their obligations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in respect of protected species, particularly bats, which may be affected by the replacement lighting design.

Invasive Species

The applicant is reminded of their obligations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in respect of invasive species which may have taken hold on the steps during their period of closure to the public.

