

Officer Report

Case Reference: 25/00962/FUL
Location: 99 Church Street Littleborough Rochdale OL15 8AA
Proposal: Change of Use from a dwellinghouse (Class C3) (part ground floor) to office accommodation (Class E) together with conversion of loft space, the addition of two velux roof windows, internal alterations, insertion of new window to side elevation and alterations to fenestration on the front elevation
- Part retrospective
Recommendation: Refuse
Officer: Rosalind Gralton

SITE LOCATION

The site relates to 99 Church Street, a two storey end terrace property. The site level drops to the rear of the property to reveal a third storey/ basement level on the property.

The site is located within the Littleborough Town Centre Conservation Area.

The site is located 65m outside of the Littleborough Town Centre boundary. There are no listed buildings in the setting of the building.

PROPOSAL

Planning permission is sought to convert the existing dwellinghouse to a mixed use with ground floor office and two-bedroom dwellinghouse. The proposed works include the loft conversion and alterations to the fenestration, including the insertion of a larger, full height, window opening at the ground floor front elevation.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Sub-Regional

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (PfE)

The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan was adopted and became part of the statutory development plan for each of the 9 authorities covered by the plan on 21st March 2024. The following policies are relevant:

JP-P1 Sustainable places

JP-P2 Heritage

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

DM1 General Development Requirements

E1

C1 Delivering the right amount of housing in the right places

P3 Improving design of new development

C3 Delivering the Right Type of Housing

P2 Protecting and enhancing character

SO5 Improving accessibility and delivering sustainable transport

T2 Improving accessibility

DM1 General Development requirements

SD1 Delivering sustainable development

Unitary Development Plan (UDP):

G/D/1 - Defined Urban Area

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):

Supplementary Planning Guidance note 'Guidelines and Standards for Residential Development' (June 2016).

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

None

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Conservation Officer

Objections raised. Comments within the report.

Highways Officer

No objections.

REPRESENTATIONS

Letters of notification were sent to neighbouring properties. 4 objections were received.

Concerns raised include

- Impact on parking
- Impact on the Conservation Area
- There are lots of new homes being built in Littleborough due to poor supply and therefore conversion of an existing residential use to commercial is not acceptable.
- Owner has informed me it is to be used as a HMO
- The site is not appropriate for an office
- Disruption during the works have blocked the highway
- A rat infestation at the property
- Various other matters comprising allegations that do not form material planning considerations.

Officer Response:

- The application is assessed at face value on its own merit. The application does not seek permission for a HMO and therefore this cannot be assessed. In the instance a breach of planning permission occurs, the planning enforcement team should be contacted.
- Disruption caused during construction is protected under separate legislation
- Rat infestation should be reported to Environmental Health

Principle of Development

Permission is sought for the change of use of the first floor into a self-contained flat. Places for Everyone establishes the need for at least 616 net additional dwellings per year in Rochdale to meet the housing needs of the borough. Policy C1 of the Core Strategy aims to maximise the potential of previously developed sites within the urban area to achieve a target of 80% of new housing of previously developed land. The site falls within the 'defined urban area' as set out in Policy G/D/1 of the saved Unitary Development Plan (UDP). Furthermore, policy JP-H4 of PfE states that new housing should be delivered a density appropriate to the location, reflecting the relative accessibility of the site by walking, cycling and public transport and the need to achieve efficient use of land and high-quality design.

The principle for development of a flat, relating to this application, is therefore established by virtue of the existing use of the property. The proposal would result in no net loss of housing supply due to the upstairs flat conversion.

The proposed office is located 65m outside the town centre boundary and is classed as an edge of centre site, as defined within Annex 2 of the NPPF. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF is relevant in this instance:

'When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre. Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale, so that opportunities to utilise suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are fully explored.'

The application seeks planning permission for an office which falls under Use Class E (formerly B1). Given that use class E now comprises a number of commercial uses expected within town centres, the change of use to an office could undermine the vitality and viability of the nearby Littleborough Town Centre. The application site is not within a designated centre nor is the application supported by a sequential test that may demonstrate an absence of any sequentially preferable sites.

As offices are clearly noted to comprise a main town centre use, and both the NPPF and Core Strategy Policy E1 are explicit that sequential approaches are required for proposals relating to main town centre uses which are not in a designated centre, the application is not supported by sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it would not have an unacceptable impact upon the vitality and viability of Littleborough Town Centre.

Heritage and Design

Policies P3 and DM1 of the Council's adopted Core Strategy requires development proposals 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. Paragraph 135 of the NPPF goes on to state that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and are sympathetic to local character and history. Paragraph 139 states that development that is not well designed should be refused.

The National Design Guide sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. It states that new development is influenced by the existing characteristics of the street scene, including the relationships between buildings, such as façade design, degrees of symmetry and the pattern and proportions of windows and doors.

The application property forms part of an attractive terrace within Littleborough Town Centre Conservation Area. It is a two-storey property, that is taller and later than adjacent terraces but is still constructed in the local stone. It likely dates from the late 19th century, unlike the remainder of the terrace, which has a date stone of 1799. The original timber windows and doors have been replaced with UPVC but it still retains some architectural features of interest, including the stone door surround and stone cills and lintels. The application building makes a modest, positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The proposal seeks to replace the existing ground floor window and replace this with a full height window. The Conservation Officer was consulted on the proposals and raises concerns about the alterations to the front elevation and the visual impact of the larger window. The existing openings are domestic in proportion and reflect the original character of the property as a dwelling. The larger opening would appear discordant and disproportionate on this residential property. No details have been provided of this enlarged window, and without careful detailing

and high quality materials, the level of harm is likely to be greater. For the avoidance of doubt, a larger UPVC window would not be supported.

While the impact would be minor, it would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the conservation area and would neither preserve nor enhance its character or appearance. This harm does not appear to have been justified. Any harm needs to be weighed against any public benefits stemming from the proposals.

As such, Paragraph 215 of the NPPF is engaged. *'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'*

There is no reason stated by the applicant as to why this change is necessary to facilitate the conversion of the ground floor into an office. No public benefits have been put forward by the applicant, nor does the proposal offer any gain in housing provision over and above the existing site. The proposed window would disrupt the fenestration pattern across the terrace and undermine the visual harmony of the street scene. According to the National Design Guide, new development should respect existing symmetry and patterns to preserve local character. While the property is a later addition, the fenestration plays a key role in maintaining cohesion with the wider terrace. Altering this would break the continuity of the façade, fragmenting the appearance of the terrace and eroding its collective identity.

The proposed replacement of the existing window with a full height window represents poor design by disrupting the established fenestration pattern and visual harmony of the terrace. This change erodes the building's historic character and undermines the architectural integrity of the wider street scene. The proposed development therefore fails to comply with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of the need for development to be well-designed, Policy JP-P1 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document, and Policy P3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

Amenity: DM1 and SPD

Occupier Space standards:

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF seeks to ensure that new developments create a high standard of amenity for future users. Furthermore, in conjunction with the SPD, Policy DM1 of the Rochdale Core strategy aims to secure a good standard of amenity for future occupants, including in relation to changes of use. As such, both the NPPF and the Core Strategy promote National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) on internal amenity, with NPPG being a 'material consideration' when taking decisions on planning applications.

The Nationally Described Space Standards is a technical document which establishes minimum internal floor areas for new dwellings, in order to ensure an acceptable standard of amenity for future occupants.

The existing plans indicate the property is currently across 3 floors, basement level, ground level and first floor level. The basement level is utilised for storage, the ground level is for kitchen and a lounge, and the first floor level shows three rooms. On the assumption this is incorrectly labelled as the kitchen and lounge it is assumed the existing property is a two bedroom, one bathroom.

The proposed plans show the basement level would be utilised as storage and a W/C for the dwelling, ground level would occupy the kitchen, first floor would occupy the living room, bedroom and main bathroom, with the proposed loft conversion also occupying a bedroom. The total floorspace would be approximately 110sqm. For a two bedroom property across three floors there is no minimum requirement for a house size as defined within the NDSS. However on the basis the property would be a 3 bedroom property across 3 storeys, the minimum NDSS total floorspace would measure 90sqm. As such, the proposal exceeds the required minimum floorspace. The bedroom on first floor is proposed to measure 8.5sqm, which meets the minimum requirement for a single bedspace. The top bedroom would have an internal floorspace of 21sqm. As such, these exceed the NDSS requirement for 3 bedspaces.

The proposed elevations do not show the proposed rooflights as shown on the proposed site plan. In the instance of an approved application this would be requested from the agent. The proposed outlook for the rooms at first floor level, including the rear bedroom window are consistent with the existing property and considered acceptable. The proposed second floor bedroom however would only be served by rooflights, which, when positioned at an assumed height of 1600mm above ground level, is not considered an acceptable level of outlook for the main bedroom in a dwellinghouse. As such, it is not considered this would provide the occupier of that bedroom with sufficient light, and is considered unacceptable.

Neighbouring Amenity

The proposed introduction of the large front window at ground floor and large window on the side elevation would not increase the existing level of privacy that neighbouring properties are currently afforded. The proposed windows would not overlook anything that is not already located within public view, and therefore is considered acceptable.

The proposed rooflights would not provide outlook and therefore are not considered unacceptable with regard to overlooking. The internal alterations would not introduce habitable room windows where there are none as existing.

Therefore, the proposed development would not result in a harmful impact on the existing levels of privacy and is considered acceptable. Additionally, the proposed bedroom window would provide adequate outlook and access to natural light.

None of the proposed works would result in an overbearing or overshadowing impact.

Noise impact:

Policy DM1 requires all new development to mitigate against any adverse impacts from noise. The site is located on a busy main road on the edge of Littleborough Town Centre.

Given the use of an office at ground floor, it is not considered the proposed change of use and development would result in the proposal being incompatible with the residential use above, particularly as impacts can be limited by use of planning condition.

Overall, and subject to the recommended conditions, the proposed development would offer future occupants and neighbouring residents an acceptable level of amenity, in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework, Policy JP-P1 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, Policy DM1 of Rochdale Council's Core Strategy, and the Council's Guideline and Standards for residential Development SPD.

Servicing

The plans indicate the storage of a bins within the existing rear yard. This is considered to be acceptable.

Highways: DM1 and T2, Appendix 5

Whilst the applicant has indicated no on-site parking spaces, the Council's Highways Officer raised no objections to the proposed development. The officer concluded that the changes of use is unlikely to generate a significant volume of traffic and that it is close enough to town centre amenities and quality transport links. Moreover, they raised no concerns regarding refuse collection.

Recommendation: Refuse

Refusal(s) (4)

- 1 The proposal would not improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area nor does it comply with the development plan and therefore does not comprise sustainable development. There were no amendments to the scheme, or conditions which could reasonably have been imposed, which could have made the development acceptable and it was therefore not possible to approve the application.
- 1 The application fails to demonstrate that the site is sequentially preferable and would seek to site a main town centre use outside of any designated centre. In the absence of any appropriate information to demonstrate otherwise, the proposals would be harmful to the vitality and viability of the Littleborough Town Centre. The proposal would therefore fall contrary to the requirements of Policy E1 of the Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2 By virtue of its poor design, the revision of the existing front window opening to a larger glazed window would result in visual harm to the cohesion of the street scene and fenestration, which would be at the detriment of the terraced streetscene. This would amount to less than substantial harm caused to the Littleborough Town Centre Conservation Area. In failing to take account of positive characteristics of the surrounding built environment, namely through failing to have regard to the pattern and proportions of fenestration present across the terrace, the development would comprise a harmful and unjustified alteration that would not be well-designed. No public benefits have been identified that would outweigh this harm. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policy P1, P2 and P3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy, Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of Places for Everyone and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 3 The proposed development would result in insufficient outlook for the occupants of the bedroom located on the second floor of the property. This would not result in a high level of amenity for the occupants, contrary to Paragraph 135 of the NPPF. The proposal fails to comply with the requirements of Policy G9 and DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy, JP-P1 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development plan, and policies contained within the NPPF,

For the avoidance of doubt, the decision relates to the following plans and documents:

1

- Location Plan
- Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations Ref IPS/R/99/OL158AA dated 16/07/2025
- Heritage Impact Statement prepared by Townscape
- Existing Floor Plans and Elevations Ref IPS/R/99/OL158AA dated 16/07/2025