

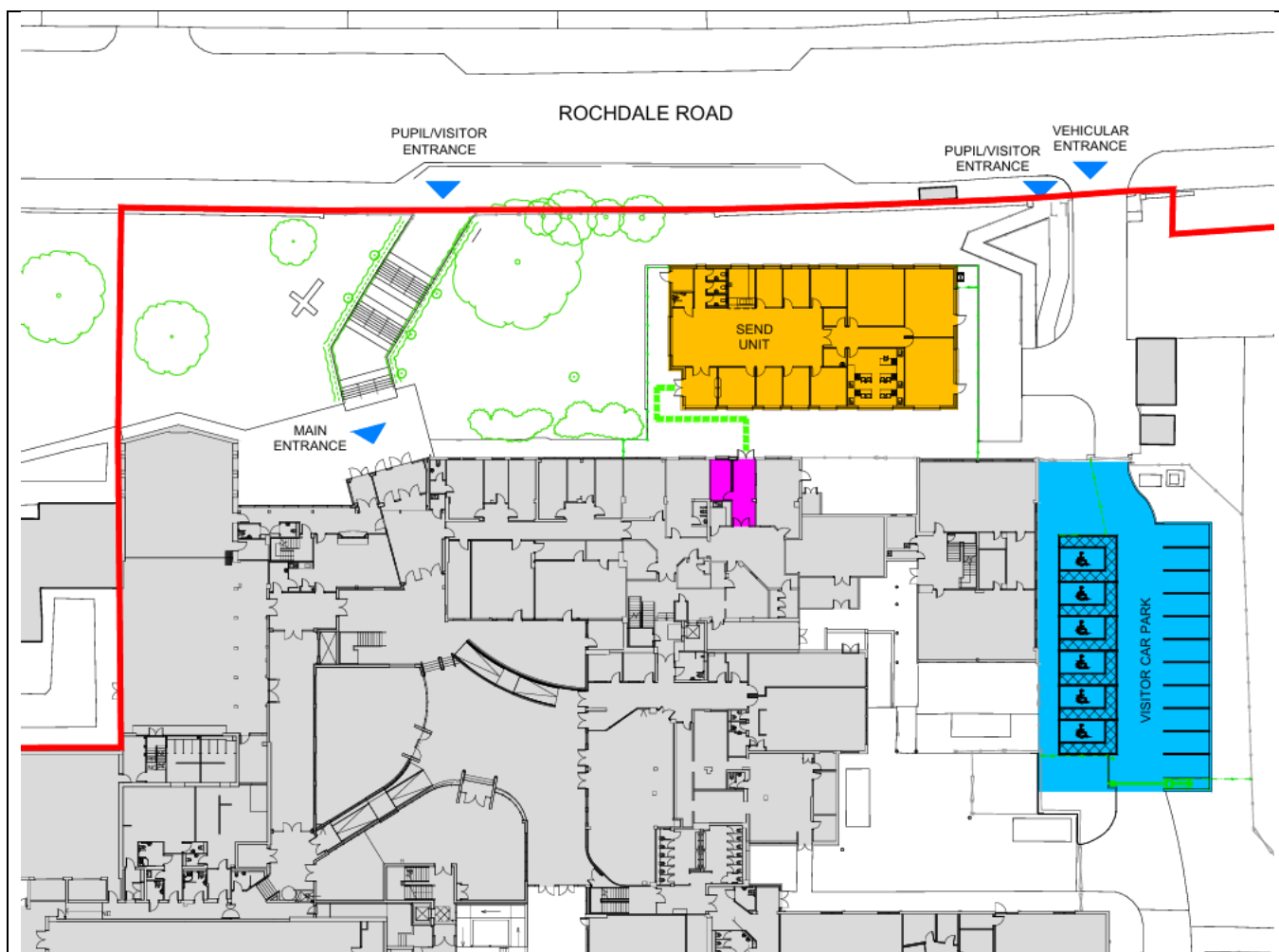
URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	19.05.26
Application Reference	PL/2026/0316
Address	Cardinal Langley RC High School, Rochdale Road, Middleton, Manchester, M24 2GL
Proposal	Erection of a single storey building to provide a new SEND unit facility including relocation of visitor car park, alteration to north facing fenestration of existing building, installation of security fencing/gate and landscaping works

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

Places for Everyone (PfE) Joint Development Plan

SUMMARY

Whilst the educational benefits and clear need for such a facility are acknowledged, it is important that design quality is not overlooked, as both functional requirements and high-quality design can and should be achieved in tandem.

Overall, the proposal is considered to fall significantly short of expected design quality. It fails to respond to the established street character, particularly through the loss of the strong landscaped frontage and lack of a coherent replacement strategy. The building's siting and architectural approach are not adequately justified, and the absence of a clear design narrative further weakens the scheme.

I am unsupportive of the proposal.

DESIGN POLICY

Pre-Application NPPF Paragraph 40:

'Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality preapplication discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.'

The site proposal would have benefited from a formal pre-application process, particularly given the significant weaknesses in the design response.

Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments: *'will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development,'* Policy P3 of

the Core Strategy acknowledges that good design will improve the image and attractiveness of the borough as a place to live, work and visit. This policy requires all new developments 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.

The revisions to the NPPF in July 2021 establish clearly that development which is not well designed should be refused, and conversely, significant weight should be given to development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design. The December 2023 revisions cemented the role of beauty in placemaking and the planning system; in support of this, the Government has produced a suite of guidance documents including Building for a Healthy Life (BHL), the National Model Design Code (NMDC) and the National Design Guide (NDG) which form a material consideration in the assessment of the design of development proposals, and aid Local Authorities and developers alike in understanding if development proposals are well-designed.

Rochdale Borough Unitary Development Plan BE/2:

Development proposals will be required to demonstrate good design by: a) Ensuring that they are compatible with or improve their surroundings by virtue of their scale, density, height, massing, layout, materials, architectural style and detail and means of enclosure b) Creating visual interest in areas or buildings lacking character

Site Analysis and Architectural Response

The proposal shows limited evidence of meaningful site analysis or engagement with appropriate architectural precedents. Instead, it replicates weaker characteristics of the existing college building, which has not aged well. A pre-app, and a design statement would have benefitted the proposal, where a design response could have been contextual and helped justify the design decisions that have been made.

This part of Rochdale Road is characterised by a consistent building line set back and elevated from the highway. A strong boundary treatment typically red brick wall, alongside a raised grass verge and pockets of planting, including trees, helps mediate the transition between the public realm and built form. This established pattern is reinforced by the residential properties on the opposite side of the road, creating a coherent and legible streetscape.

Where this established pattern is proposed to be altered, it would need to be justified by a design response of remarkable quality—one that positively contributes to the street scene and acts as a clear and meaningful marker for the school.

The proposal does not demonstrate how landscape is incorporated around the unit, nor how the existing positive frontage buffer—formed by grass verge, planting, and boundary treatment—is retained or reinterpreted. It remains unclear how this important transitional space is maintained within the scheme.

Furthermore, the absence of key verified viewpoints limits understanding of the development's visual impact, particularly in terms of how the forward positioning of the building affects its perceived scale and massing within the street scene.

Design / Materiality

Local policy requires design 'which is of a high standard, demonstrating innovation and originality'. In its current guise, the proposal also fails to meet Paragraph 135 of the NPPF. Importance and consideration should be given to design. The designer has failed to undertake this exercise with the application very short on any positive design impetus.

Materials proposed are basic and uninteresting. The use of render has enough precedent in the borough to demonstrate how this has aged poorly and weakened the character of areas. The use of render does not constitute high quality design and will not be supported.



The existing elevations, largely defined by cladding and glazing, now appear dated and fall short of what would be considered high-quality design. While this approach may have been a practical solution at the time, it has not aged well in visual terms and now presents as tired and lacking in refinement.

This proposal represents an opportunity, in line with policy expectations, to enhance the quality of the built environment. However, it risks repeating an approach that already appears outdated and of limited design merit. In particular, the existing cladding contributes to an overall sense of visual decline.

A more considered design response could have explored how the elevations might be improved—either through a careful reworking of the existing language or a more thoughtful reinterpretation that delivers a higher standard of design. As it stands, the proposal does not fully respond to the prominence of the site or the expectations for design quality in this context.

While signage may be subject to a separate application, it currently appears as an afterthought rather than an integrated element of the overall design, and its contribution to the quality and legibility of the school frontage has not been adequately considered.

There is no real reference to architectural detail in the design. Elements such as the ‘clunky’ roof further add to poor quality design and are not supported.

Landscaping

The proposal does not adequately justify the loss of the strong green buffer that is characteristic of this stretch of the street. It remains unclear whether meaningful replacement landscaping is proposed, and as a result the overall approach risks creating a significantly poorer visual outlook than the existing situation. In particular, the removal of established trees and frontage planting is not convincingly addressed or mitigated.

There was also an opportunity to rationalise and improve elements such as the areas of double-sided railings as part of a more comprehensive frontage strategy. Instead, the scheme reads as a piecemeal addition rather than a considered response to a prominent site. The design approach appears to treat the building as if it were a secondary or back-of-site extension, with insufficient regard to its visibility from the public highway.

Additional Information Required

- Street elevations / Elevations with further context
- Street views

Information regarding window reveal depths etc. Generally, an acknowledgement to design importance

I feel the design is some way off that even the addition of these items would not be able to help justify it.