

Officer Report

Case Reference: PL/2026/0249
Location: OX AND PLOUGH INN, 178 NEW ROAD,
LITTLEBOROUGH, OL15 8NL
Proposal: Change of use from Public House (Sui Generis) to 4 no. self-contained flats (Use Class E) including alterations to fenestration and the erection of a bin store
Recommendation: Approve with Conditions
Officer: Bob Melling

SITE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

The application relates to 'The Ox', a vacant public house which fronts Halifax Road / New Road (A58) at the junction with Smithy Bridge Road. The site is located approximately halfway between Rochdale and Littleborough town centres and is 800m northwest of the Smithy Bridge village centre. It is also located 640m (10 minutes on foot) from Smithy Bridge train station with regular bus services also in operation along the A58. The site is within the defined urban area but does not lie within any designated local centres.

The building, shown on the mid-19th century Ordnance Survey map, is a red brick structure with stone detailing, including window surrounds and banding. The western elevation is stone, while the eastern elevation appears to have been rebuilt in brick. It retains historic character as a former public house and is identified as a non-designated heritage asset. Dearnley Old Hall (Grade II*) lies to the rear and is a highly significant 17th-century building with earlier medieval origins. The site is within its immediate setting.

PROPOSAL

Permission is sought for the change of use of the building to comprise four self-contained one-bedroom flats. Externally, two blocked up windows would be reinstated, an existing window on the side elevation would have the cill lowered, an additional window would be installed on the southwest facing side elevation and multiple window units would be replaced with uPVC windows with escape opening lights. A timber enclosed bin store would be erected within the rear yard and would be directly accessed from Back Union Road via an additional gated access formed within the existing brick wall. No off-street parking is proposed.

RELEVANT PLANNING AND ENFORCEMENT HISTORY

21/01085/FUL: Erection of two storey building comprising of two apartments. Refused (October 2021).

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Sub-Regional

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (PfE) 2024:

JP-S1 Sustainable Development

JP-H1 Scale Distribution and Phasing of New Housing Development

JP-H3 Type, Size and Design of New Development

JP-P1 Sustainable Places

JP-P2 Heritage

JP-P3 Cultural Facilities

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS) 2016:

C1 Delivering the right amount of housing in the right places

C3 Delivering the right type of housing

P1 Improving image

P2 Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage

P3 Improving design of new development

G7 Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity

G9 Reducing the impact of pollution, contamination and land instability

T2 Improving accessibility

DM1 General development requirements

Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 2006:

G/D/1 Defined Urban Area

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):

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

PUBLICITY

Site Notice: 05.05.2026

Press Notice: 15.05.2026

Neighbour notification letters: 21.04.2026

Weekly List: 07.05.2026

ASSESSMENT

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

The application seeks to convert a vacant public house to a residential use comprising apartments.

The site lies within the defined urban area, and saved UDP Policy G/D/1, which seeks to concentrate development in urban areas, is therefore relevant. The site does not lie within a designated commercial area or local centre, as established under saved UDP Policy S/6.

PfE Policy JP-H1 states 'A minimum of 175,185 net additional dwellings will be delivered over the period 2022-2039 ... The new homes will be of good quality and design, adaptable, supported by the necessary infrastructure and amenities.' Specific to Rochdale, between 2025-2030, Rochdale must achieve 616 new dwellings annually to the PfE target.

The submitted application form states that the use of the site as a public house ceased in September 2025. The applicant has provided a supporting statement which explains that the public house ceased trading due to declining customer demand and a lack of profitability. The property was actively marketed for sale and/or to let following closure however there was little to no interest from future occupiers seeking to retain the premises as a public house or an alternative community use. The property has now been vacant for more than six months.

While the proposals would result in the loss of a community facility, the site is not a registered Asset of Community Involvement, has been vacant for some time with unsuccessful marketing attempts, and its loss has attracted no objections from member of the public. Furthermore, there are other community facilities (i.e. pubs and restaurants) within walking distance of the application site and the loss of this public house would therefore not reduce the local community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs.

Overall, it is considered that the principle of development is acceptable as it would provide a long-term use for a vacant building on a sustainably located brownfield site outside a local centre or commercial area.

IMPACT ON CHARACTER AND HERITAGE

NPPF Paragraph 135 states 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. This is reflected in PfE Policy JP-P1 and CS Policies DM1, P2 and P3.

The application property is considered an NDHA. As such, NPPF Paragraph 216 is relevant. It states that 'the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset'.

The building, shown on the mid-19th century Ordnance Survey map, is a red brick structure with stone detailing, including window surrounds and banding. The western elevation is stone, while the eastern elevation appears to have been rebuilt in brick. It retains historic character as a former public house and is identified as a non-designated heritage asset. Dearnley Old Hall (Grade II*) lies to the rear and is a highly significant 17th-century building with earlier medieval origins. The site is within its immediate setting.

The Conservation Officer was consulted on the application and explained that there would be some harm to the legibility of the building's historic use owing to its conversion to residential use. However, the Conservation Officer acknowledged that a residential use would provide a viable future for the building. The only alterations being proposed are the replacement of a door on the ground floor rear extension with a window and roof window. In regard to the extension, it has render and is clearly a later addition. The scale of harm to the to the significance of the building would be less than substantial.

No concerns are had in principle regarding the reinstatement of blocked up windows on the rear elevation, the lowering of the sill of an existing side elevation window or the addition of a window to the side elevation. Furthermore, it is noted that various replacement windows would be installed with side opening casements. Details of the windows can be secured via condition, however the Conservation Officer has advised that windows should either be fabricated in timber or aluminium, rather than the uPVC currently proposed, particularly on the front elevation. With uPVC, the introduction of side opening casements into the existing narrow openings would result in windows which are dominated by the frame rather than the glass. Using aluminium or timber for the windows would enable more slender frames, which would help to mitigate this.

The proposed bin enclosure within the rear yard would be well-designed and suitably screened from public view. It is considered that this element of the proposals would have a neutral impact on the significance of the building.

Given the minor nature of the external works, it is considered that the proposal would not harm the setting of Dearnley Old Hall.

Overall, while a degree of less than substantial harm has been identified because of the change of use, it is considered that the public benefit of securing the long-term viable use of the building would outweigh the identified harm. Subject to the attached condition regarding the windows, it is considered that the proposals would accord with CS Policies P1, P2 and P3, PLE Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2, and the NPPF.

RESIDENTIAL AND OCCUPIER AMENITY

Noise and Disturbance

CS Policy G9 requires new development to not cause unacceptable noise pollution (inter alia). Regarding the subdivision of dwellings, SPD Section 4.12 states that 'the subdivision of a property to create additional dwellings or Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) can intensify the level of occupation and may give rise to additional noise and disturbance.

Neighbouring residents may be affected adversely, either directly, through party walls, or indirectly, as a result of increased traffic movements and parking problems. Large, detached dwellings are generally more suitable for sub-division into smaller units; terraced properties, unless large, are less suited to this form of development because of noise transmission through party walls and the likelihood that any on-street parking problems which may exist will be compounded.'

The application property is a large, detached building that is well-separated from the adjacent buildings. It is located on a busy throughfare and faces an important junction. Given the setting of the property and the level of separation with nearby residential receptors, it is considered that the building would be well-suited to residential conversion without resulting in undue noise disturbance for neighbouring residents.

The application is accompanied by a Noise Impact Assessment that outlines several recommendations in order to achieve the relevant noise assessment criteria. The recommended mitigation measures would ensure an acceptable acoustic environment for future occupants of the proposed dwellings and a condition is attached to ensure the recommendations are carried out and verified prior to occupation.

Neighbour Amenity

New developments are expected to create a high standard of amenity for existing and future users. CS Policy DM1 requires that proposals do not adversely affect the amenity of residents or users through visual intrusion, overbearing impact, overshadowing or loss of privacy.

SPD Paragraph 4.1 of sets out the minimum distances that should be retained between residential dwellings.

No concerns are had regarding the relationship with the residential properties to the sides and rear; however, it is noted that the front elevation windows would measure some 20m to the directly facing front elevations of the properties across Halifax Road to the south. This level of separation falls below the 21m SPD requirement. Notwithstanding, it is noted that the former pub had living accommodation arranged over the first floor consisting of three bedrooms, a lounge, a kitchen and a bathroom. Given the existing arrangement of living accommodation, it is considered that the shortfall of 1m would not be materially harmful.

Occupier Amenity

All proposals should provide high quality accommodation for future occupants. PfE Policy JP-H3 states that all new dwellings should accord with the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS). The NDSS sets requirements for minimum gross internal floor areas dependent on the number of bedrooms, bed spaces and storeys. The NDSS also sets out minimum sizes for double and single bedrooms.

Each flat would meet the minimum gross internal floor space standards set out in the NDSS, except for Flat 2. Flat 2 would have a bedroom measuring 17.55sqm, which would be sufficient in size to provide two bed spaces. Therefore, it would fall 0.8sqm short of the minimum standard. However, given that this flat would have direct access via patio doors to the rear amenity space, it is not considered that the negligible shortfall would be unduly harmful to the amenity of the future occupant/s.

All bedrooms would meet the minimum size standards and each flat would be provided with separate storage space. While it is noted that the designated storage space would not be

sufficient in size, it is not considered that this would be unduly harmful given that three of the proposed flats would comfortably exceed the minimum gross internal floor space standards.

Overall, it is considered that all habitable rooms would receive sufficient natural light and outlook. Concerns were raised regarding the bedroom in Flat 1, however a second window was added to the side elevation to improve the living conditions in this room.

It is acknowledged that there would be a small private yard to the rear that residents would have access to. Notwithstanding, it is also noted that the property is located approximately 20 minutes on foot to the Hollingworth Lake Country Park. Therefore, it is considered that future residents would be well-served by outdoor recreational opportunities.

Overall, it is considered that the proposals would not unduly impact the amenity of the neighbouring properties while providing future occupants of the dwellings with an acceptable standard of amenity. The proposed development would therefore accord with CS Policies DM1 and G9, PfE Policies JP-H3 and JP-P1 and the NPPF.

HIGHWAY AND ROAD SAFETY

CS Policy T2 seeks to improve accessibility by locating development where good access to public transport is available or can be provided, and in all circumstances, prioritises the safety, accessibility and amenity of those who live or have business in the area. Policy DM1 also states that all development proposals should provide satisfactory vehicular access with adequate parking, manoeuvring, and servicing arrangements taking into account of the proposed use and location. NPPF Paragraph 116 states that 'development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.'

At present there is no parking available within the site and parking for users of the public house is available on the public highway (Back Union Road). The application initially proposed to use Back Union Road for parking and bin storage; however, this was removed from the plans as the Highways Authority will not formally recognise the public highway as a parking and bin storage area. The bin storage area was subsequently re-located to the rear of the building.

The concerns of objectors regarding parking and access have been duly noted and considered during the determination of the application; however, the Highways Authority have raised no objections to the proposal notwithstanding the lack of designated parking for the flats. The site is in a sustainable location within walking distance of the train station and bus routes and low car ownership is expected. No changes are proposed to the highway network and no new highway safety concerns have been raised by the Highways Authority. Furthermore, the application is supported by a waste management strategy.

Overall, it is considered that the proposed development would not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety and would accord with the relevant policies within the CS, PfE and the NPPF.

ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

The application consists of a change of use from a public house to four self-contained flats. At present, there is no ecological value to the rear and therefore the application meets the de minimis exemption. Accordingly, it is not considered that the statutory requirement to provide 10% BNG is applicable here.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with conditions.

SUMMARY OF THIRD-PARTY REPRESENTATIONS

5 objections were received raising the following concerns, which have been summarised as follows:

Land Ownership, Rights and Access

- Alleged encroachment onto land subject to an active leasehold interest and long-established use by neighbouring occupiers.
- Failure to recognise or safeguard existing rights of way and access routes used for deliveries, servicing and refuse collection.
- Obstruction or potential loss of access to existing rear parking spaces serving neighbouring properties.
- Concerns that proposed layout would block or interfere with established vehicular routes between adjoining sites.

Officer's Response

- The application has been validated with the correct ownership certificate, and the red edge boundary has been checked and accepted for planning purposes.
- Land ownership disputes, lease interests and private rights of way are civil matters and not material planning considerations.
- Amendments to the scheme have removed parking and servicing encroachments, reducing potential conflict with adjacent land uses.

Parking Provision and Highway Safety

- Inadequate parking provision for the proposed residential units, with no clear compliance with parking standards.
- Loss of informal parking currently relied upon by nearby businesses and staff.
- Displacement of vehicles onto surrounding streets, increasing congestion.
- Unsafe parking layout lacking turning space, potentially forcing vehicles to reverse onto the main road.
- Increased risk of traffic conflicts and accidents at a busy junction and surrounding roads.

Officer's Response

- The previously proposed parking provision has been removed following discussions with the Local Highway Authority.
- The Highway Authority would not formally recognise the area as acceptable parking provision, notwithstanding land ownership.
- The development is therefore assessed on the basis of no on-site parking, which is acceptable in principle.
- The Local Highway Authority has raised no objections to the amended scheme.

Impact on Existing Businesses and Operations

- Loss of essential rear access required for deliveries, servicing, and general business operations.

- Reduced operational viability of neighbouring businesses due to restricted access and parking pressures.
- Inadequate provision for commercial bin storage and servicing arrangements.
- Constraints on maintenance access to buildings, equipment, and utilities.

Officer's Response

- The amended plans remove the previously indicated parking areas, reducing conflict with neighbouring access and servicing arrangements.
- Impacts on private business operations and commercial convenience are not determinative planning considerations.
- The proposal remains acceptable in land use terms.

Design, Layout and Residential Standards

- Substandard internal storage provision within proposed flats, not meeting nationally described space standards.
- Concerns that the overall layout is impractical and fails to provide adequate servicing and amenity arrangements.

Officer's Response

- The proposed accommodation has been assessed against relevant standards.
- Overall, the scheme is considered to provide an acceptable standard of residential accommodation, and any minor shortfall in storage provision is not sufficient to justify refusal.

Drainage and Flood Risk

- Reports of increased surface water flooding in the rear area following recent works.
- Lack of drainage assessment or sustainable drainage (SuDS) details within the application.

Officer's Response

- The proposal primarily involves internal alterations with minimal external works.
- Given the limited scale of development, a drainage strategy or SuDS details are not considered necessary in this instance.
- There is no evidence to suggest the proposal would materially increase flood risk.

Compliance and Site Management

- Concerns regarding non-compliance with previous planning conditions, including landscaping and tree planting.
- Poor site management, including safety issues such as damaged infrastructure, unstable fencing, and inadequate ground conditions.

Officer's Response

- Matters relating to compliance with previous permissions are addressed separately under planning enforcement regimes where necessary.
- Given the scale and nature of the development (primarily internal alterations), a Construction Management Plan is not considered necessary or reasonable.

Refuse and Servicing Arrangements

- Lack of a clear and workable refuse storage and collection strategy.
- Risk of bins being located unsuitably close to windows or obstructing the highway.

Officer's Response

- A formalised bin store is proposed to the rear of the property, positioned behind an existing boundary wall.
- The applicant has submitted a Waste Management Strategy, which has been reviewed by the Local Highway Authority.
- No objections have been raised in respect of refuse storage or collection arrangements.

General Planning Concerns

- Failure to adequately assess cumulative impacts on parking, safety, and local economic activity.
- Requests for refusal or deferral pending resolution of access, parking, drainage, servicing, and compliance issues.

Officer's Response

- The application has been assessed against the Development Plan and all material planning considerations.
- Amendments have addressed key concerns, particularly the removal of parking and clarification of servicing and refuse arrangements.
- The proposal is considered acceptable and does not warrant refusal or deferral.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Highways: (Summary) No objections.

Conservation Officer: (Summary) No objections subject to details.

Environmental Health: No comments received at time of writing.

PROCEDURAL STATEMENT

Article 35 Declaration

Officers have worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner based on seeking solutions to problems arising in relation to dealing with the planning application. No significant problems have arisen during the consideration of this application, and the application has been determined in a timely manner, in accordance with the policies with the Development Plan.

Human Rights and Public Sector Equality Duty

The provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 have been taken into account in the processing of the application and the preparation of this report. In particular, Article 6 (1), of the European Convention on Human Rights in relation civil rights and a fair hearing; Article 8

of the ECHR in relation to the right to respect for private and family life and Article 1 Protocol 1 of the ECHR in relation to the protection of property have all been taken into account.

In addition, the Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination in respect of certain protected characteristics namely: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, or beliefs and sex and sexual orientation. It places the Local Planning Authority under a legal duty to have due regard to the advancement of equality in the exercise of its powers including planning powers. Officers have taken this into account in the assessment of the application. In particular due regard has been afforded to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Officers are satisfied that the application material and Officers' assessment has taken into account these issues.

The application has been considered in accordance with the Rochdale Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy – Embracing All Voices (2024-2026), which seeks to promote a culture of equity, diversity and inclusion that benefit the community as a whole.

Recommendation: Approve with Conditions

Condition(s) (7)

- 1 The development must be begun not later than three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason. Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

- 2 The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following drawings and documents hereby approved unless otherwise required by the conditions below:

Existing Plans And Elevations. Dwg no. K242-01
Location Plan. Dwg no. K242-02
Proposed Ground Floor Plan. Dwg no. K242-03 rev A
Proposed First Floor Plan. Dwg no. K242-04
Proposed Elevations. Dwg no. K242-05 rev B
Proposed Typical Cross Section. Dwg no. K242-06
Existing Block Plan. Dwg no. K242-07 rev A
Proposed Block Plan. Dwg no. K242-08 rev A
Proposed Bin Store. Dwg no. K242-09
'Noise Impact Assessment'. Ref: AA0653 by Azymuth Acoustics UK
'Planning Statement Addendum – Loss of Public House (Community Facility Justification)' by Keystone Estates
'Waste & Recycling Storage Statement' by AJ Cocker Associates dated April 2026

Reason for the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory development in accordance with the policies within the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, the saved Rochdale Unitary Development Plan, the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 3 No above ground works shall take place until full product specifications for the windows and detailed designs of the window reveals, at a scale of not less than 1:50, to be used on the development hereby approved, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The windows shall be installed in accordance with the approved details thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of ensuring a satisfactory visual appearance to the development, to ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the building and in accordance with policies P2, P3 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 4 The development hereby approved shall be constructed in accordance with the noise mitigation measures set out within the submitted 'Noise Impact Assessment'. Ref: AA0653 by Azymuth Acoustics UK. No part of the development shall be occupied until such time as a verification report has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority to confirm that the approved ventilation and acoustic measures have been implemented to achieve the required maximum noise levels. The noise attenuation measures shall be retained as installed thereafter.

Reason: To safeguard the amenities of residents in order to comply with the requirements of policies G9 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, policy JP-P1 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5 No part of the development shall be occupied until such time as the existing paraphernalia on the elevations of the building have been removed and made good in accordance with details which have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of ensuring a satisfactory visual appearance to the development, to ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the building and in accordance with policies P2, P3 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 6 The development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until such time as the refuse and recycling bin store has been installed in complete accordance with drawing number K242-09 and made available for use prior to the approved development first being brought into use. The refuse and recycling store shall be retained as constructed for its intended use thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of ensuring a satisfactory visual appearance to the development and in accordance with policies P3 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, policy JP-P1 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 7 The development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until such time as details for the design of cycle store has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The duly approved scheme shall be installed in complete accordance and made available for use prior to the approved development first being brought into use. The approved cycle store shall be retained as constructed for its intended use thereafter.

Reason: To ensure the provision of satisfactory and secure facilities for cycle storage and in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with Policies P3, T2 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policies JP-P1 and JP-C6 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Approval Reason(s) (1)

- 1 The Local Planning Authority worked proactively with the applicant to identify various solutions during the application process to ensure that the proposal comprised sustainable development and would improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area and would accord with the development plan. These were incorporated into the scheme and/or have been secured by planning condition.