

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	13.07.26
Application Reference	25/01018/FUL
Address	Land At Waterfold Lane Heap Bridge Bury BL9 7JY
Proposal	Residential development of a 100% affordable housing scheme comprising of one, three storey block of 24 apartments and a row of 6 terraced dwellinghouses, alongside creation of access, landscaping, drainage and other associated works

Introduction

The [National Design Guide](#) sets out the ten characteristics of a well-designed place. Well-designed places have individual characteristics which work together to create its physical **Character**. The ten characteristics help to nurture and sustain a sense of **Community**. They work to positively address environmental issues affecting **Climate**. They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#).



Figure: The ten characteristics of a well-designed place

Source: National Design Guide, 2021

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Reason(s) for Consultation

- Urban Design / Architecture

Scheme Image(s)



Source: Application submission

Assessment

This assessment has been made against:

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:

- Rochdale Core Strategy policies:
 - S03 – To improve design, image and quality of place
 - P1 – Improving Image
 - P2 – Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage
 - P3 – Improving design of new development
 - DMI (General Development Requirements)
- Supplementary Planning Documents:
 - Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide
 - Oldham and Rochdale Residential Design Guide

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

➤ G/BE/1 - Design Quality

➤ BE/2 - Design Criteria for New Development

Greater Manchester's Streets for All Design Guide

Places for Everyone (PfE) joint development plan

SUMMARY

This is a challenging site with a number of significant constraints and, as a result, it has been difficult to achieve a scheme that could be considered genuinely high-quality design. In my view, the site appears overdeveloped, with frontages that are heavily dominated by parking.

A less intensive and more organic form of development may have resulted in a stronger design response, although I acknowledge that this approach would also present its own challenges given the site's limitations.

On balance, I do not support the proposal.

Background

Informal advice has been provided throughout the application during the site meeting with the applicant, their agent, and the architect. At that point I highlighted several concerns relating to the layout, appearance, and overall design approach.

I have continued to express reservations regarding the proposed layout, particularly in terms of how the development addresses and engages with the site frontage. Compared with the earlier schemes presented to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), there has been a significant improvement in both the layout and the architectural treatment of the buildings.

However, the site is subject to notable constraints, most significantly the need for noise attenuation arising from the M66 to the north. The acoustic environment is inherently poor, and the persistent impact of traffic noise detracts from the site's overall amenity. As a result, it is difficult to conclude that a development of this scale on this parcel of land would achieve the high standard of design quality and place-making expected within the planning framework.

DESIGN

For reference:

Plots 19 -24 are referred to as 'Block A'

Plots 7-18 are referred to as 'Block B'

Plots 1-6 are referred to as 'Flats'

Layout

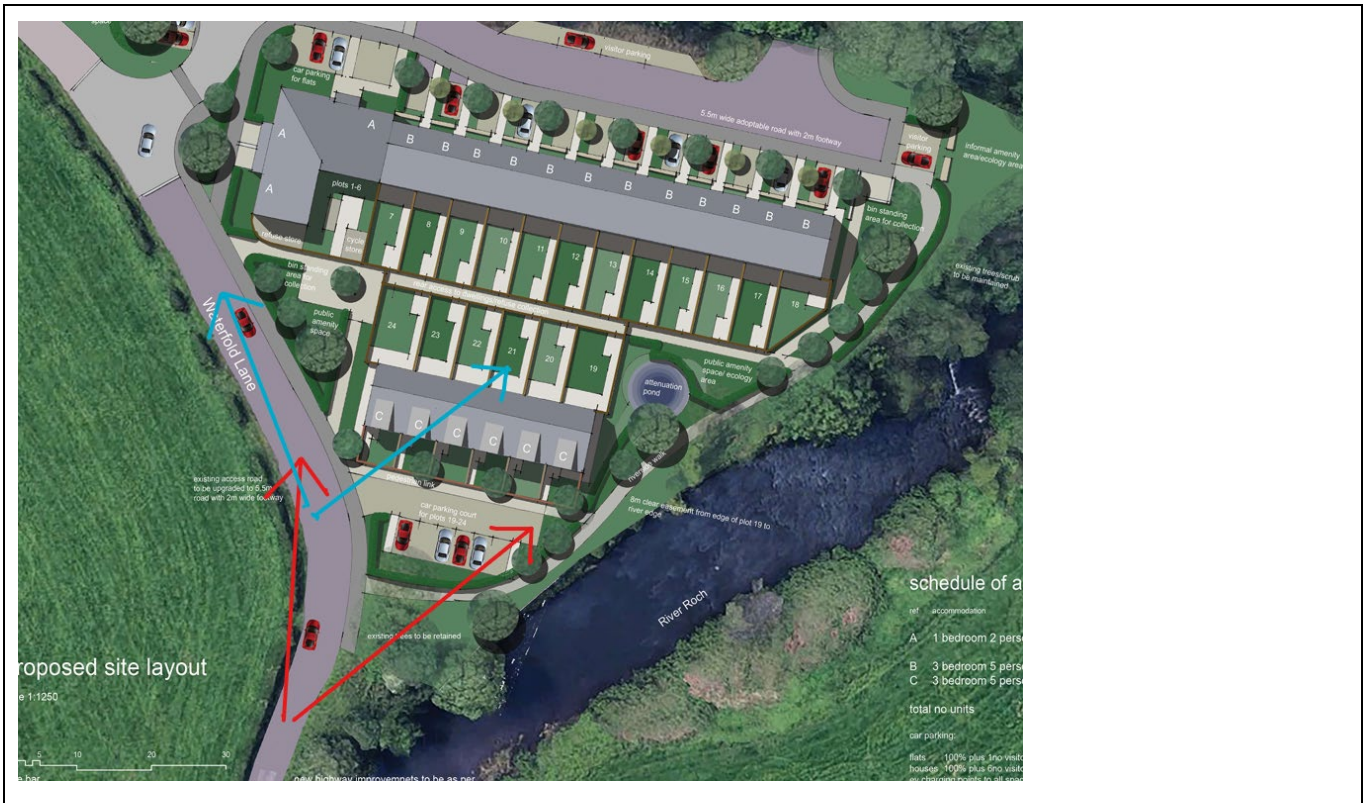
Fronting Waterfold Lane

The scheme would function better as an organic layout, with houses fronting Waterfold Lane. This would be more in keeping with the immediate context which is partially rural despite featuring terrace rows. This would then be a natural continuation from dwellings that already exist on Waterfold Lane. That being said, there are six existing dwellings that are offset slightly at an angle away from the bend in the road so within reason there could be scope to accept something similar as per shown in this proposal.

Whilst the elevation design is quite 'urban' in appearance, the principle of a townhouse-led approach would be considered acceptable.

Views of the development on approach have not been provided, despite this being a key viewpoint for understanding how the scheme will be perceived within the wider context.

Whilst the applicant has sought to screen elements previously identified as unsightly, such as parking areas, concerns remain. These issues are inherent to the site constraints and continue to affect the quality and appearance of the proposed development.



Even with additional landscaping, it is unlikely that tree planting would effectively screen features such as the large rear garden fences. By comparison, the boundary wall treatment proposed to the frontage of Block B is attractive and, if replicated along Block A, would create a far more positive and cohesive street frontage.

However, the prominence of the tall mixed fencing along Block A appears unavoidable and results in a frontage that is neither attractive nor well-related to the public realm. Consequently, the scheme fails to present the strong and active frontage that would normally be expected of a development of this nature.



As the development is approached further along Waterfold Lane, the visual impact of rear garden boundary treatments remains evident despite the proposed landscaping. Views would continue to include additional rear garden fencing together with an angled side/gable elevation of the apartment block. Greater confidence is required that these elements can be adequately softened, supported by detailed tree specifications and additional sectional drawings demonstrating the effectiveness of the proposed screening.

The scheme appears to prioritise a frontage towards the M66, which is difficult to reconcile with the site's context. There are more attractive and valuable outward views away from the motorway towards the surrounding area, yet these opportunities have not been fully utilised or reflected in the layout and orientation of the development.

Parking

Is the provision of a single parking space for the three-bedroom, five-person dwellings justified? There is concern that this level of parking provision could result in overspill parking on the highway, leading to vehicles being parked along footways and throughout the development. This would detract from the quality of the street scene and could result in an environment dominated by parked cars.

Block B presents a positive frontage through the use of an attractive boundary wall treatment. However, the benefits of this approach are undermined by a layout that is heavily reliant on frontage parking, which in turn dominates the building elevations. Whilst these views may be experienced primarily by residents of the block, they nevertheless fall short of demonstrating high-quality design.

More generally, the extent of frontage parking across the site is excessive and becomes a defining feature of the proposal. The cumulative impact is a car-dominated environment that detracts from the quality of the public realm and weakens the overall design approach.

Informal amenity space

The informal amenity space is awkwardly arranged and does not appear particularly usable. The inclusion of two parking spaces within this area feels like an afterthought and further compromises its function.

Whilst the constraints of the site are acknowledged, they have clear consequences for the quality of the design. The 3m-high acoustic fences required within the centre of the site are likely to be prominent and visually intrusive. As a result, views from parts of the development are likely to comprise little more than a series of high acoustic fences, creating an enclosed and engineered environment.

In a different setting, features such as the riverside walk and ecological area would be positive additions. However, given the site's proximity to the motorway, these spaces are likely to be heavily affected by noise and may not provide the level of amenity that would normally be expected.

Façade design

Since the early pre-application discussions, there has been a notable improvement in the architectural treatment of the scheme. The elevations of Blocks A and B are visually interesting and incorporate a contemporary approach to fenestration that would work well when paired with a high-quality brick material.



If this application were deemed acceptable, I would advise the officer not to accept the materials specified but rather request a sample panel on site to explore a different variety of brick types (the

current specification is not reflective of the colour and texture shown in the elevations but is more similar to the existing dwellings nearby).

Similarly, consideration should be given to a higher-quality timber finish that would provide greater confidence in the longevity and appearance of the material. The proposed anthracite-coloured fibre cement cladding lacks the visual quality and durability typically associated with more traditional materials such as brick or timber and risks appearing overly dominant against the softer brick façade. This element could be better resolved through the use of a higher-quality timber product or an alternative complementary brick type.

Dormers

I would normally caution against the use of front dormers, but the design intent shown could work, provided there is a clear commitment to high-quality materials and detailing – so we would look to be improving roof materials shown, particularly considering the prominence of roof tiles along the frontage of Block A. Clarification is sought as to whether this includes opening elements, as this would materially affect its appearance. Further detail is also required at roof level; thick or visually heavy fascias would not be supported, for example.

There is a concern that these amount to quite a lot of changes within an application.

Apartment Block

I remain uncomfortable with the relationship between the apartment block and the terrace. This junction would have been more successful if the two elements had been expressed separately through a clearer visual break, helping to improve legibility and coherence along the elevation.

Whilst the design is not intended to be continuous, the prominent corner position of the apartment block suggests that it should respond more effectively to the adjoining terrace, particularly through its material treatment. As currently proposed, the transition feels unresolved. The use of three different materials across the elevation creates unnecessary visual complexity, whilst the change in roof form and eaves line results in an awkward composition.

A more logical approach may have been to maintain the three-storey form and continue the eaves line and pitched roof treatment around the corner, creating a stronger and more cohesive architectural response.



A reduction in the number of dwellings, a frontage along Waterfold Lane, would reduce the sense of overdevelopment and create opportunities for additional landscaping and acoustic mitigation. The space released through a lower-density approach could be used to provide more meaningful green infrastructure and buffer planting, resulting in a stronger overall design response.

DESIGN POLICY

In its current form, the proposal fails to meet design policy.

Rochdale Core Strategy (2016)

C3 requires a high standard of development and layout that produces attractive places.

Policy DMI Requires all development proposals to demonstrate that they are of a high-quality design and take the opportunity to enhance the quality of the area.

Policy P3 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.

National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 135b states that planning decisions should ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character and visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and effective landscaping.

The National Design Guide states, 'Where the character of an existing place has limited or few positive qualities, then a new and positive character will enhance its identity'.

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

Urban Design Guide SPD (Oldham & Rochdale)

- Emphasises contextual design, active frontages, and material quality
- Encourages early engagement and use of CGIs to communicate design intent

Residential Development SPD (2016)

- Sets expectations for layout, scale, massing, and boundary treatments
- Advocates for private entrances and garden spaces where appropriate