

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	02.08.26
Application Reference	PL/2026/0549
Address	Vacant land north of Drake Street. Site is bound to the north by St. Alban's Street, east by Broadfield Stile, and to the west by Speedwell Garage, Rochdale, OL16 1PJ
Proposal	Residential development comprising 27 affordable dwellings, including one apartment building (3 storey) containing 23 apartments and a terrace (2.5 storey) of 4 family houses, together with associated external works.

Introduction

Reason(s) for Consultation

Architecture and Urban Design

Scheme Image(s)



Source: Application submission

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

Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Appraisal (2021)

SUMMARY

The principle of development is considered acceptable. Since pre-application, the scheme has evolved positively in several respects. However, weak architectural detailing and a limited material palette remain key shortcomings that undermine its overall success. As consistently highlighted throughout the pre-application process, the scheme would need to demonstrate a genuinely high-quality, design-led approach in order to justify its departure from the prevailing character and form of the area. The amendments required to achieve this are relatively modest and straightforward to implement and should not give rise to significant viability or cost concerns. Without these changes, I would be unable to support the scheme.

Application Context

Pre-App Process

The applicant has engaged in the pre-application process, resulting in a meeting and detailed urban design response. The conclusion evolving from this process was a full dwelling /townhouse proposal for the full site would offer a stronger response to the existing urban pattern and character of the area. That said, detailed design advice had been provided to help the applicant refine their three-storey apartment block option along Drake Street, which required most changes.

Housing Delivery

The scheme represents a partnership-led approach to delivering 100% affordable housing by Great Places on behalf of Rochdale Borough Council (TBC). The sensitivities of the site are recognised, as are the pressures associated with meeting funding-dependent deadlines for housing delivery.

The quality of placemaking should not be compromised, even in the context of delivering much-needed housing. There is an opportunity to successfully achieve both.

Site Context

There is a strong architectural context for the designer to draw upon, including materiality and detailing. Combined with the area's heritage significance, the site presents an excellent opportunity to deliver a high-quality scheme that reinforces and enhances its positive character.

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 PI – Improving Image: Developments should improve the image of the area. Poor or unremarkable design that does not elevate the local image or contributes negatively to the streetscape could be rejected.

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)

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

Residential Development SPD (2016)

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

DESIGN

This section should be read in conjunction with the detailed feedback provided at the pre-app stage: 'Proposed Elevations 1-2_AMENDED AK'.

Massing

The proposed massing would be taller and denser than the existing terrace rows along Drake Street, which currently define the urban grain. It was understood that a compromise is acceptable but this would require the elevational design and detailing to sensitively reinterpret the established terrace row pattern. Extensive design guidance was provided at the pre-application stage on how to achieve this successfully, emphasising the importance of creating the appearance of narrow frontages through the careful delineation of architectural detail.

Boundary Treatment

It would be preferable to preserve the stone wall fronting Alban's St. in its entirety (see diagram). This would maintain the relationship to the conservation area and would help the applicant in how they respond to the gable elevation. It would mean any extra visual interest (which is certainly still required) can be concentrated to the first floor level. This existing stone wall does appear to be leaning and surveys should be taken to assess its condition. It is likely that this may have to be repaired / rebuilt.

Where the wall turns the corner, historically it was shown as a brick wall with a stone capping. A brick wall would provide a more appropriate response to the street scene than the currently proposed arrangement, where the transition between materials appears awkward and lacks coherence.

I am also concerned by the complete removal of the wall enclosing the proposed car park and its replacement with defensive planting. While I acknowledge that the existing boundary treatment on this side of the site is varied and may warrant alteration, the wholesale replacement of a masonry wall with planting would not represent a contextually sensitive design response.

Amendment required:

1. Reinstate height of stone wall at the corner /junction. Wall may require repair / rebuild. Lower Brickwork wall to Broadfield Stile considered acceptable.
2. Ensure walls have adequate coping stone at head (not shown in visuals but has been labelled in drawings). Improve transition between different height walls (see photo example).
3. Introduce boundary wall back to St. Alban's Street (in front of defensive planting)



Detailed Design

Whilst the overarching design principles appear to have been incorporated into the proposals at first glance, closer examination suggests they have not been successfully realised, and as a result the scheme lacks the quality originally envisaged. A key aspect of the design approach intended to help contextualise the development was the use of brick detailing and articulation. The vertical recesses were intended to break down the length of the elevation, and it is important that this is achieved through genuine depth and relief within the façade. Simply introducing vertical strips of contrasting brickwork does little to achieve this objective and, in my view, exacerbates the issue.

The sketch guidance provided at the pre-application stage shows a stronger visual composition, achieved through a greater emphasis on depth, shadow, and detailed articulation. Concerns were raised even at that stage regarding the proposed colour palette, which is why advice was given to explore stepped brick courses at ground-floor level. This approach would help introduce texture and relief to the façade, breaking up the expanses of flat brickwork and providing a more legible rhythm across the elevation. Simply changing brick colour without any corresponding depth or architectural expression does little to reduce the visual flatness of the building.

I would also caution against design features that evoke the character of residential estates delivered in previous decades, where aspects of the design have not aged particularly well. This includes weak canopy detailing, limited façade articulation and poorly composed fenestration which all contribute to a perception of poor design quality, raising concerns about the scheme's longevity. While improved material quality may help elevate the development, this alone is insufficient. Further refinement is needed if the scheme is to be considered a genuinely high-quality design response.

Amendment required:

1. Add recess niche at drainpipes / repeated intervals as demonstrated in the pre-app advice.



Colour Palette

The current colour approach is not working effectively, although I am prepared to reserve judgement pending review of a suitably sized sample panel. While there is some rationale for the use of a buff brick to reflect the stonework adjacent to the park, red brick is the predominant material within the surrounding area, and the proposed combination, particularly in the current proportions, is not successful. The two colours are not sitting comfortably together in this proposal and consideration should be given to the following:

- Using a different brick at ground floor level, but in a complementary shade or blend of the same colour family.
- Retaining a single brick type and introducing contrast through mortar colour and/or brickwork patterning at ground floor level.
- (Also)Introducing a stronger distinction where the material transition occurs.

The soldier course detailing is appropriate and adds visual interest, but it is not particularly successful when combined with the proposed brick colours. The apartment block, when viewed in isolation, could potentially accommodate this colour palette. The issue arises when it is considered alongside the proposed houses, where the overall material strategy appears inconsistent, incoherent and lacking a clear unifying design rationale. The use of multiple colours does not appear to have been applied with sufficient discipline and, as a result, is not working effectively.

The random use of contrasting brick surrounds and vertical colour bands is unsuccessful, detracting from rather than enhancing the architecture. These features appear superficial and do not compensate for the absence of detail, depth and quality in the façade composition.

A more restrained palette, applied with greater consistency and supported by stronger detailing, would likely deliver a more successful design outcome.



Whilst I appreciate the materials and fenestration are better in the application proposal this is an example where the transition does not work because of both the colour and the lack of articulation.

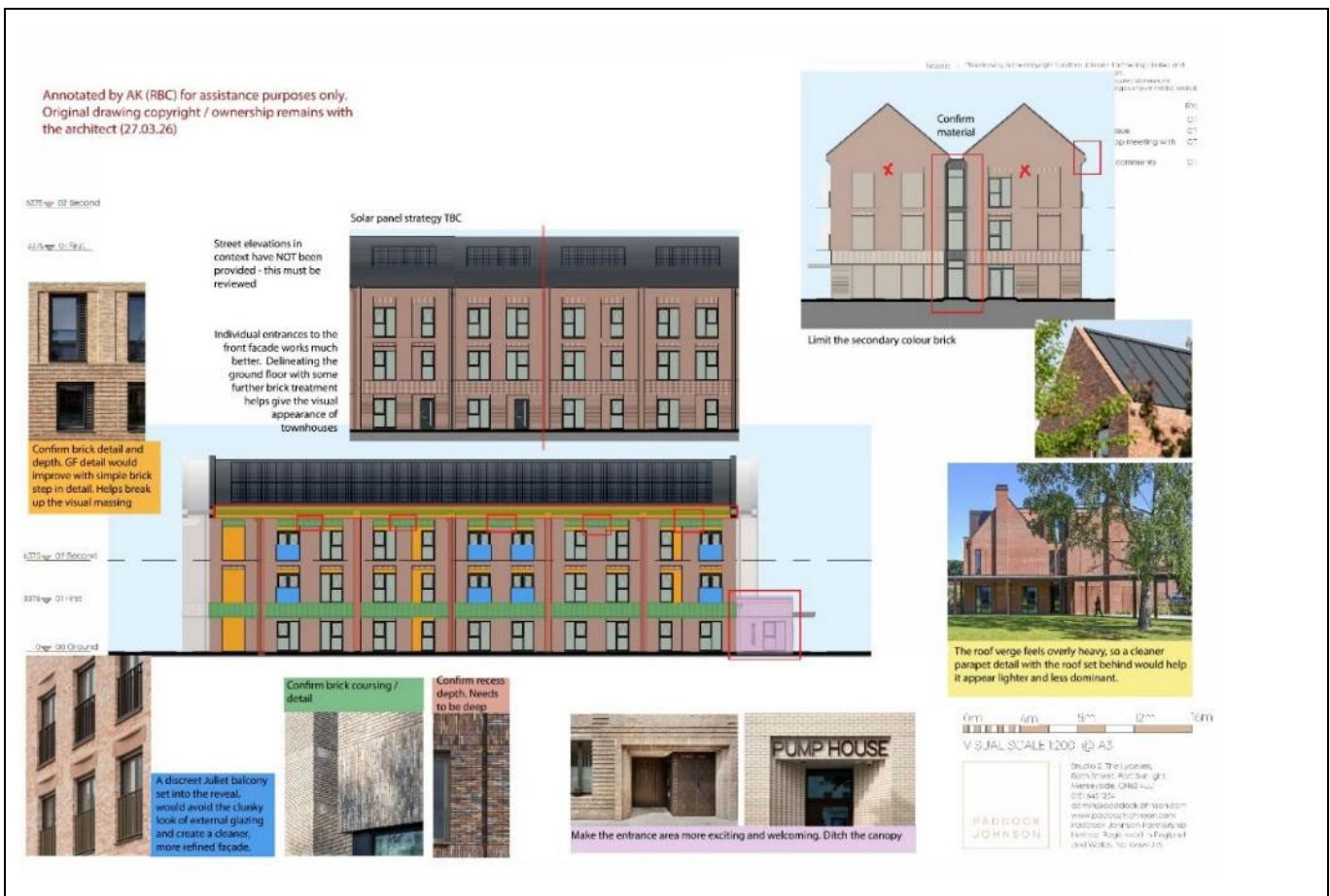
The below examples demonstrate more effective ways in alleviating the colour palette concerns.



Amendment required:

1. Strongly advise reviewing and amending colour of brickwork
2. Add additional detail to ground floor brickwork

I would once again refer you to the detailed feedback provided at the pre-app stage; this drawing showed much more effective treatment to the ground floor allowing a suitable differentiation to take place between different brick types etc. There is a lack of precedents in this submission, and this help sheet draws upon successful built schemes that have benefitted from such architectural detailing.



Apartments Side Elevation and Entrance

Confirm the brick window recesses depth. This should be notable to add visual interest to a blank elevation.

Accepting this is a largely brick dominant elevation, the elevation can still benefit from an additional window, which the floor plan does allow (the bedroom can be flipped or increased slightly with the building footprint).

The entrance from Drake Street is now better resolved, benefiting from a greater setback from the pavement and a more interesting arrival created through architectural detailing. The parapet coping appears unnecessarily dominant, although I assume this is illustrative rather than representative of the intended detail. A slimmer coping would be more appropriate and may require a slight variation in height relative to the vertical brick band.

Amendment required:

1. Confirm detailing and look to reduce overdominance of brickwork by adding a window. See sketch below.



Parking

Parking to the rear, away from frontages to the highway(s) or public areas is welcomed. More parking spaces would be preferred but Highways are able to advise.

Hard Landscaping

I could not find a plan defining the hard landscaping. Across the borough, we do not promote developments that are heavily dominant in tarmac. I would expect some differentiation to parking spaces and paved areas at the very least.

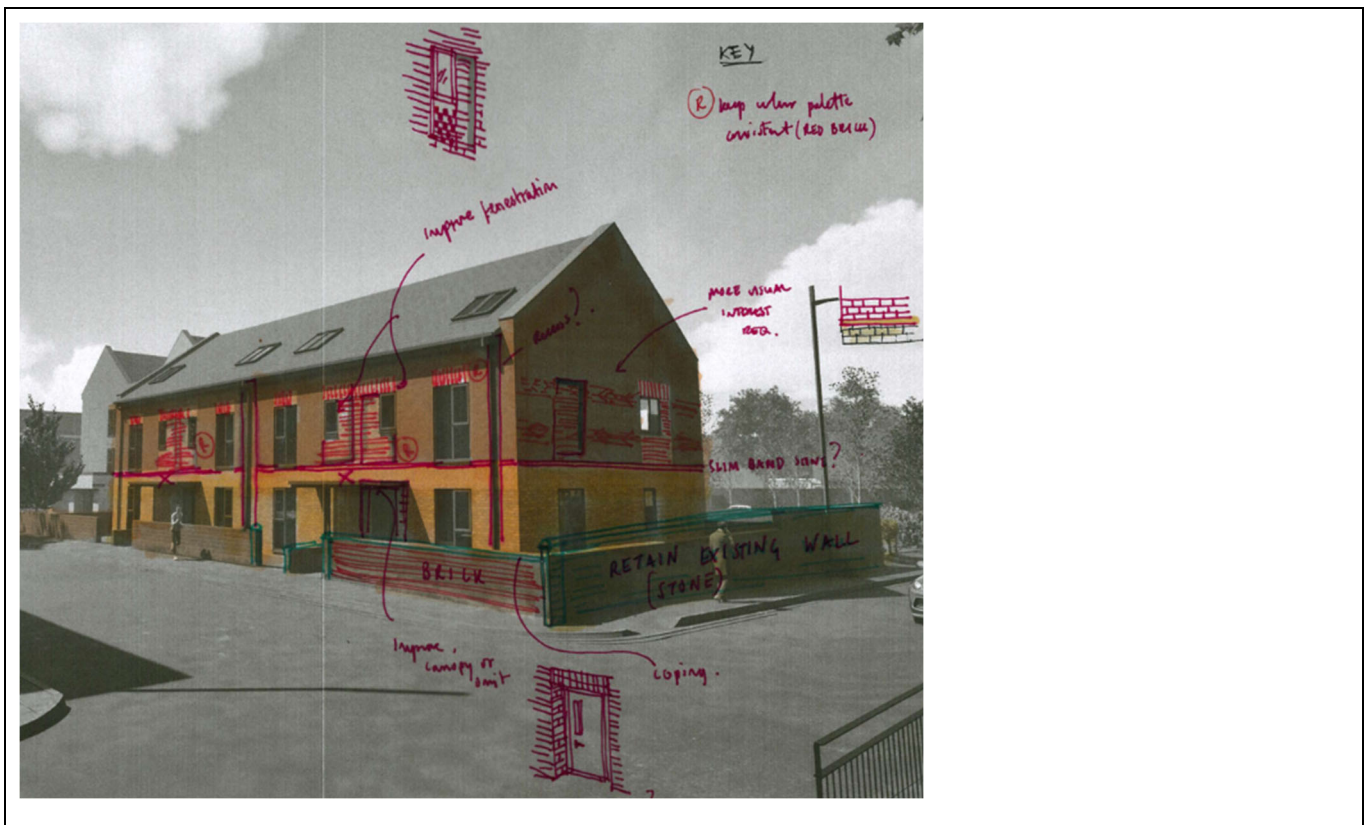
Amendment required:

1. Clarify treatments to external floor finishes. Tarmac over-use is not supported.

Townhouses

Having a frontage presented to the highway along Broadfield Stile elevation is welcomed allowing cluttered elements such as parking areas and unsightly boundary treatments hidden from view. The design of this elevation is however a cause for concern due to colour and materials. The bathroom window as shown is not helping either.

The first-floor side elevation facing Broadfield Park would benefit from additional articulation and visual interest. In its current form, it presents a weak arrival experience and does not provide a strong introduction to the site for pedestrians approaching from the park.



Amendment required:

1. Look to organise the floor plan to relocate the kitchen / improve the fenestration.
2. First floor – add further visual interest to compensate the absence of a double frontage dwelling
3. Review comments earlier regarding detailed design and colour palette

Other Materials

Roof

There would be an expectation for natural slate to be used across all roofs. This should be presented as part of a sample panel.

A concern, previously raised at the pre-application stage, remains the dominance of solar panels on the Drake Street elevation. Their extent is visually prominent and alters the character of the terrace row. It is recommended that the panels are arranged more selectively, with gaps to reveal the roof material, an important element of the streetscape. Panels should also be recessed within the roof plane to reduce their visual impact and ensure they are better integrated into the overall design.



Sample panel

Any condition relating to external materials should require an on-site sample panel demonstrating the proposed brickwork, mortar, windows, and roof materials. Applicants are advised to consult the Local Planning Authority prior to seeking discharge of the condition to ensure the sample panel maximises its value in assessing the quality and appearance of the development.

I would encourage the exploration of alternatives to anthracite grey, which has been used extensively across the borough with mixed results. While the area exhibits a varied palette of window and door colours, slimmer window frames tend to have a much lighter visual impact. In contrast, thicker dark-coloured frames and doors can appear overly dominant and detract from the overall character of the building.

Noise / Balconies

Noise assessment reports have been provided although I would question why balconies would be located on a busy, noisy road lacking any significant view.

I would recommend a condition requiring details of the balcony design to be submitted and approved. As discussed at the pre-application stage, the balcony should be inset within the brickwork reveal to provide a clean and robust architectural detail, avoiding visually intrusive fixings and ensuring greater durability and longevity over the lifetime of the building.

Conclusion

It was emphasised from an early stage that, for the scheme to depart from the traditional two-storey terraced form that characterises Drake Street and adopt a deeper-plan, three-storey building, a high standard of architectural detailing would be paramount. This approach was reflected in the design guidance provided throughout the pre-application process. Whilst the scheme has improved in terms of layout, particularly through the reorientation of parking and revisions to the fenestration of the principal apartment block, the architectural detailing remains lacking. As a result, the elevations appear flat and unresolved, failing to provide the cohesion and visual interest necessary to successfully justify the proposed departure in form.

The amendments suggested are relatively straightforward to address and, anticipating the usual arguments relating to viability and cost, would not place an unreasonable burden on the development. I would therefore urge the case officer to give due weight to the prominence of the site and its proximity to the positive conservation-led improvements delivered within the Conservation Area and, more recently, at Broadfield Slopes. Given this context and local and national design policy to support, a higher standard of architectural quality and detailing should reasonably be expected.

Annotated by AK (RBC) for assistance purposes only.
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the architect (27.03.26)

Notes: | This drawing is the copyright Paddock Johnson Partnership Limited and
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ages should not be scaled.

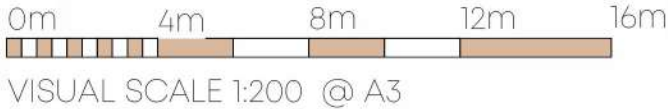
BY:	CT
Issue	CT
Op meeting with	CT
Comments	CT



Limit the secondary colour brick



The roof verge feels overly heavy, so a cleaner
parapet detail with the roof set behind would help
it appear lighter and less dominant.



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Solar panel strategy TBC



Street elevations in
context have NOT been
provided - this must be
reviewed

Individual entrances to the
front facade works much
better. Delineating the
ground floor with some
further brick treatment
helps give the visual
appearance of
townhouses

6375 02 Second

3375 01 First



Confirm brick detail and
depth. GF detail would
improve with simple brick
step in detail. Helps break
up the visual massing

6375 02 Second

3375 01 First

0 00 Ground



A discreet Juliet balcony
set into the reveal,
would avoid the clunky
look of external glazing
and create a cleaner,
more refined façade.

Confirm brick coursing /
detail



Confirm recess
depth. Needs
to be deep

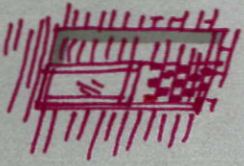


Make the entrance area more exciting and welcoming. Ditch the canopy



KEY

- (2) keep color palette consistent (red brick)



improve fenestration

more visual interest
etc.

slim band stone?

RETAIN EXISTING WALL
(STONE)

BRICK

improve canopy or
unit

copying.



?