

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	04.09.26
Application Reference	PL/2026/0692
Address	Old Hall Street, Middleton, M24 1AG
Proposal	Erection of a mixed-use building comprising of a self-storage facility (Use Class B8) and ground floor commercial units (Use Class E) together with associated access, car parking, servicing infrastructure and landscaping.

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*

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

Overall, whilst the active frontage and regeneration benefits of the scheme are welcomed, I remain of the view that greater assurance and design conviction is required in relation to the materiality and façade treatment. The architecture must be capable of making a positive contribution to the image of the town centre rather than simply accommodating the development quantum.

APPLICATION CONTEXT

Workshops / meetings including stakeholders have been held prior to this submission. Separate design discussions are being progressed for the residential apartment block and the Middleton Arena extension immediately adjacent to the site.

Stakeholders favoured the four-storey option, which would help break up the site in relation to the apartment block and was considered the most appropriate scale for the building's intended operation and use. As scale and massing have largely been reviewed, this consultation response focuses predominantly on building design

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

Policy DP3 requires development proposals to respond positively to their context and create well-designed places through high-quality architecture, built form, landscape and public realm design. Development should reinforce local character and identity whilst contributing positively to the overall quality of an area. Development proposals that are not well designed should be refused.

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

DESIGN

Site Context

The prominence of an industrial shed so centrally located earmarks many of the planning mistakes in the past. Whilst replacing the existing use in the same location is not an ideal urban planning strategy, in the light of circumstances to the original building, the principle of this proposal has already been established with numerous stakeholders,

It should also be emphasised that the poor design of the former Storage World building does not justify repeating its shortcomings. National and local policy require development to deliver high-quality design, not simply ‘justify more of the same.’

This application presents an important opportunity to redevelop a highly prominent and visible town centre site following the loss of the former industrial building. Given its central location, public visibility and emerging role within the wider regeneration of Middleton, the architectural quality of the proposed development assumes particular significance. The building will form a substantial component of the townscape and, by virtue of its scale, prominence and height, will be readily perceptible from a number of key approaches and public viewpoints. As such, the scheme must demonstrate a level of design quality, durability and visual interest commensurate with its importance within the town centre.

Activating Ground Floor Use

The active ground floor frontage comprising glazing and commercial units is welcomed. This creates a positive relationship with the public realm, introduces activity and natural surveillance, and represents a meaningful urban intervention in a part of the town centre that would benefit from increased activity and vitality. In urban design terms, this aspect of the scheme performs well and aligns with the objectives of the NPPF in supporting vibrant town centres and creating well-designed places.

Public Realm Enhancement

You could be more creative with the hard landscaping. At present it feels somewhat standard, and there is an opportunity to push this further, particularly given the commercial units will front onto public space(s). Could the design better reflect the site's history or incorporate features unique to Middleton? Is there scope for additional greening? As this space will help shape future connections to adjacent sites, its role as a transition space should not be overlooked.

FAÇADE

Brickwork

In principle, the brick elements are successful and provide a reasonable reinterpretation of Albany Mill, using recessed detailing to reinterpret the rhythm and depth of the former mill openings. However, the success of this approach is heavily reliant on genuine depth, robust detailing and high-quality execution. This will depend on careful consideration of brick type, bonding, texture, reveals and material junctions.

I would therefore like to see that the recesses and shadow lines illustrated in the submitted visuals can be delivered in practice. The depth and articulation currently shown are fundamental to the scheme's quality and should be secured through the detailed design process, rather than being eroded through later value engineering or technical refinement.*

Longevity should also be a key consideration; brick has a proven permanence and should remain the dominant façade material, with cladding clearly secondary and complementary. In this regard, I would be more comfortable seeing a greater proportion of brickwork introduced to the south and east elevations.

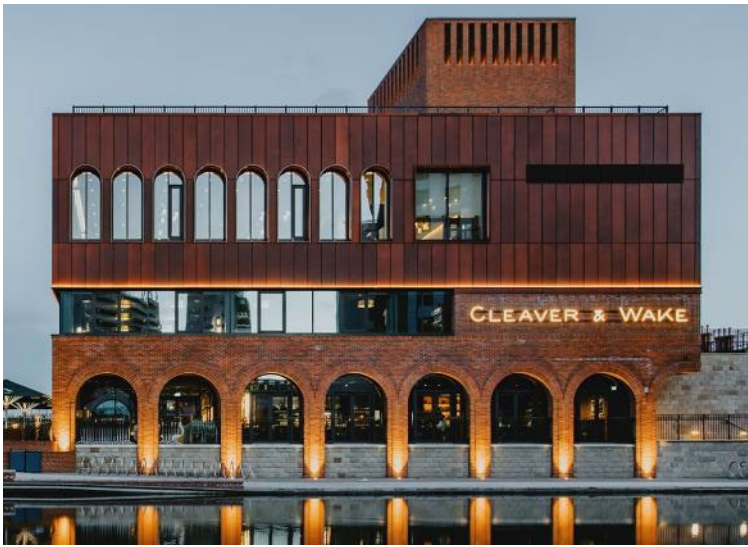
Cladding

The proposal continues to rely heavily on cladding, yet there remains insufficient confidence in its final appearance and detailing. Extensive areas of cladding can weather poorly, lack a visual depth and quickly take on a utilitarian appearance commonly associated with cinema buildings, retail back-of-house areas and service elevations rather than prominent town centre landmarks.

I would strongly encourage the applicant to explore alternative approaches that introduce greater material richness and articulation to the cladding. Relevant precedents have been provided for guidance, demonstrating how large or repetitive façades can be successfully broken down through the use of depth, recesses and shadow, creating a more robust and visually engaging architectural expression. It is much more effective to introduce a profiled metal cladding system i.e. the one used for Halle St. Peters, Manchester and considering the extent of cladding coverage I can imagine this would be a much costlier option. Nevertheless, a simple, flat-panel solution as proposed would therefore not be supported.

The precedent at The Island Quarter, Nottingham is particularly relevant, utilising the Kingspan RF-Design Recess Fix system within a material palette not dissimilar to this application proposal.

Without sufficient recesses, relief and depth, the proposed elevations risk appearing flat and overly dominant when viewed in the round. This would undermine the intended architectural concept, diminish the quality of the townscape, and result in a building whose scale is emphasised rather than moderated.



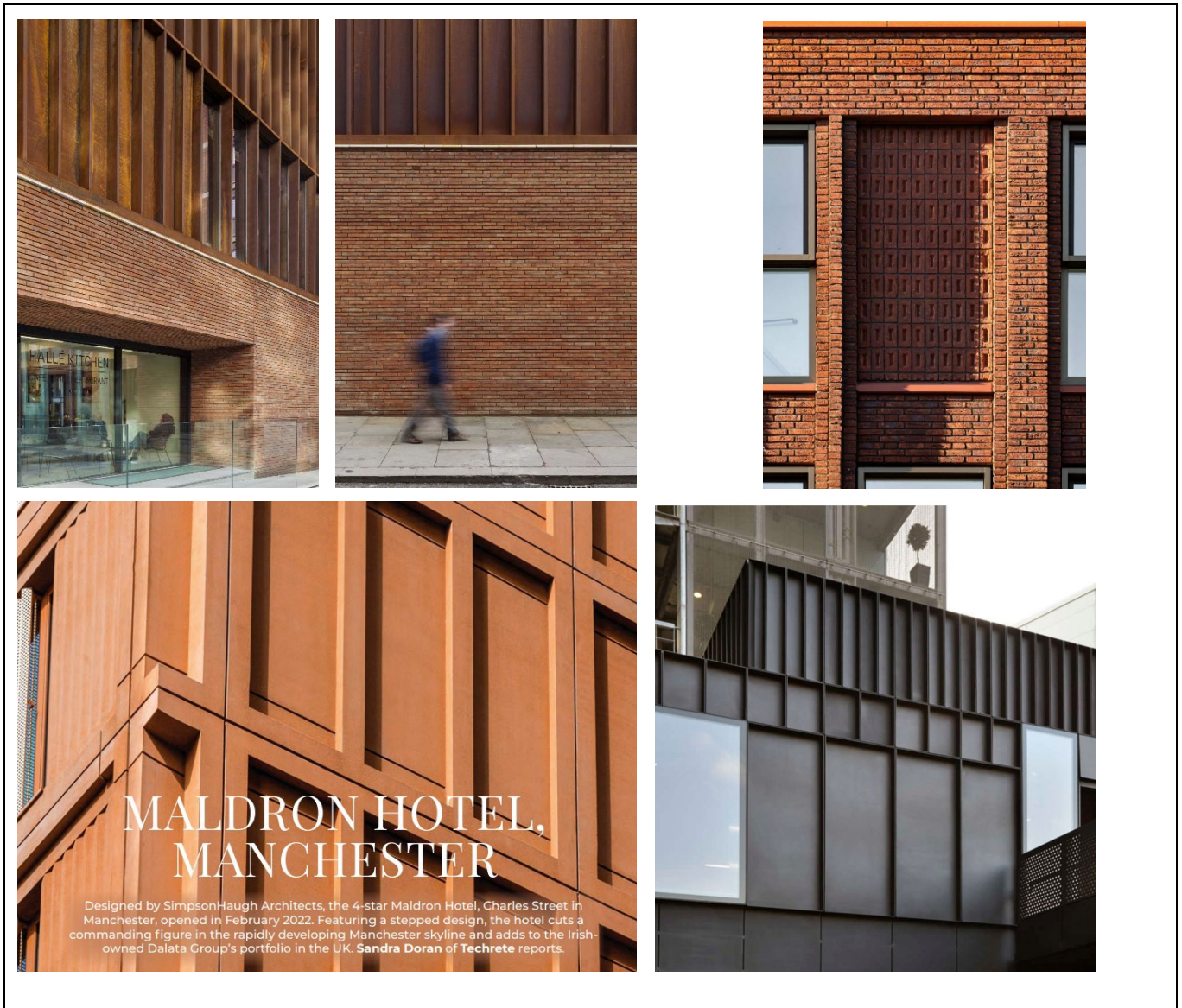
Kingspan RF-Design Recess Fix system specified in PPC Oxidised 0005 to top floor of pavilion building

Designed by Jestico+Whiles |
Delivery by CPMG

What works:

- Good proportion of brickwork, glazing and cladding panels (neither material is overbearing)
- Strong colour palette
- Narrow panel sizes work well with the colour blend
- Proportions complement the brickwork arches and vent features – general architectural language is consistent
- Where there is no glazing, the façade is well articulated still

Some precedents earlier shown to the applicant are listed below:



Furthermore, I remain concerned that the grey cladding is too prominent, particularly given its relatively uniform and uninterrupted application across the scheme. This could be improved through a more considered composition of materials and proportions, alongside the introduction of greater articulation, depth and shadow. As demonstrated by the precedents provided, these measures can successfully break down large, flat surfaces and create a more refined and visually engaging façade.

***GOING FORWARD**

I would also feel more comfortable if the design intent were to be tightened at this stage to provide greater certainty and reduce the risk of compromise during detailed design and procurement. Given the importance and prominence of the façade materials, I would strongly encourage the case officer to secure the design through appropriately worded planning conditions. A large-scale sample panel should be required, incorporating both the proposed brickwork and cladding. Small product samples alone are insufficient to properly assess the relationship between materials and the overall architectural quality of the scheme.

Guidance related to conditions discharge can be provided in the future but the expectation would be to offer a sample panel(s) similar to the outlined zones below:



The applicant is encouraged to source and test materials early in the process rather than rely on later substitutions driven by availability, lead times or cost. Not being able to deliver suitable sample materials at relevant scales should not be considered a valid justification by the case officer.

Similarly, a condition requiring detailed façade drawings should be imposed to demonstrate how the proposed recesses, returns and areas of articulation will be delivered. There remains some uncertainty regarding whether brick or brick slips will be used and, whichever approach is adopted, this should not result in any dilution of the design quality currently presented.