

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	17.09.26
Application Reference	PL2026/0511
Address	Little Nook Farm, Heywood Old Road, Middleton, M24 4GS
Proposal	Construction of 9 dwellings

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
Greater Manchester's Streets for All Design Guide

My previous comments at the Pre-App stage were intended to broaden and strengthen the contextual site analysis for this proposal. At that stage, concerns were raised regarding weaknesses in the design strategy, including the architectural approach and material palette. It was made clear that any future application would need to place a much greater emphasis on design quality.

I object to the proposal. The scheme does not adequately satisfy local and national design policy.

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

Residential Development SPD (2016)

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

LAYOUT

The site presents a poor sense of arrival, with visitors immediately confronted by a bin store, parked vehicles (including visitor parking and frontage parking serving Plot 1), and the side elevation of Plot 3. This arrangement fails to create an attractive entrance or demonstrate high-quality design principles. Furthermore, the close proximity of Plot 3 to the access road results in a prominent side wall that adds to the unwelcoming character of the approach.

Plots 1 and 2 also appear overly constrained, with the development feeling cramped and dominated by parking provision. A more appropriate solution would be to replace these two plots with a single dwelling, creating a less intensive form of development that would allow for a more generous setting. This would reduce the visual dominance of parking, improve the site layout, and provide opportunities for meaningful landscaping, including grass verges and tree planting, thereby enhancing the overall quality and character of the development.

ELEVATION DESIGN

There is little evidence that the applicant has meaningfully responded to the design advice provided at the pre-application stage. This is particularly disappointing given the extent of the guidance offered. The submitted scheme remains some way from achieving the design quality that was sought and appears not to have fully embraced the principles and recommendations set out during the pre-application process. As submitted, the proposal would have benefited substantially from a more thorough engagement with that advice.

Whilst the development does not appear to trigger the statutory requirement for a Design and Access Statement, the submission would nevertheless have benefited greatly from one. In particular, a Design and Access Statement could have demonstrated a robust site analysis, clearly articulated the design rationale, and evidenced the evolution of the scheme through the design development process. This would have assisted in understanding how the proposal responds to its context and why particular design decisions have been made. The Planning Statement provides very limited commentary on design matters and does not adequately explain or justify the approach that has been taken.

The elevations addressing Heywood Old Road are uninspiring and lack the quality expected of a well-considered residential development. Their appearance is reminiscent of lower-quality volume housebuilder products, with limited articulation, depth, or architectural detailing. As a result, they fail to create a strong frontage or make a positive contribution to the street scene. Given the site's prominence, there is clear potential for a more ambitious and higher-quality design response that would better reinforce local character and create a stronger sense of place.

To the rear, the elevational treatment lacks a clear and coherent architectural language. The arrangement of materials, fenestration and detailing does not appear to follow a recognisable design approach, and the submission provides little explanation as to how these elements relate to one another, to the wider development or to the site's context. While a degree of variation can be expected, particularly within a three-storey composition, the proposed mix of materials, forms and detailing feels arbitrary and lacks a clear architectural rationale. The result is a discordant composition that undermines the overall quality and legibility of the scheme.



The proposed boundary treatments further detract from the quality of the development. There is little evidence within the submission to suggest that boundary design has been carefully considered as part of a high-quality placemaking approach. The extensive use of close-boarded fencing would create a harsh and utilitarian appearance, resulting in poor visual amenity and an overly defensive character throughout large parts of the site. During pre-application discussions, estate railings were suggested as a more appropriate frontage treatment; however, it is unclear whether this advice has been incorporated or whether the submitted details simply propose standard metal railings. Greater clarity is required, together with a more refined and contextually appropriate boundary strategy.

REQUESTED INFORMATION

It was clearly marked in the pre-app stage for further sections and street elevations to be extended to include the neighbouring site to be submitted at the main application stage and this has not been forthcoming.

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