

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Design Officer	Azhar Kapadi
Date	30.09.26
Application Reference	PL2026/0689
Address	2-4 BETHEL STREET, HEYWOOD, OL10 1HU
Proposal	Refurbishment and conversion of the existing vacant two-storey building, including the construction of two additional floors to provide four one-bedroom apartments.

Reason(s) for Consultation

Building / Urban design

Scheme Image(s)



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

SUMMARY

The proposal fails to respond positively to the most successful aspects of the existing building and instead removes many of its defining architectural characteristics. The cumulative effect is a development that reads less as a conversion and more as a replacement building, resulting in a significant loss of character, architectural interest and local distinctiveness. The current design approach, scale and treatment of the existing building are not considered to represent a positive or successful response to the site and its context.

Further assistance from the heritage officer is advised.

I am unsupportive of the proposal.

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

CONTEXT

The applicant would likely have benefited from engaging in a formal pre-application process. Equally, the submission of a robust Design and Access Statement, supported by a thorough analysis of the site, surrounding townscape and the building's architectural significance, would have assisted in demonstrating how the design rationale had evolved and how the proposal responds positively to its context.

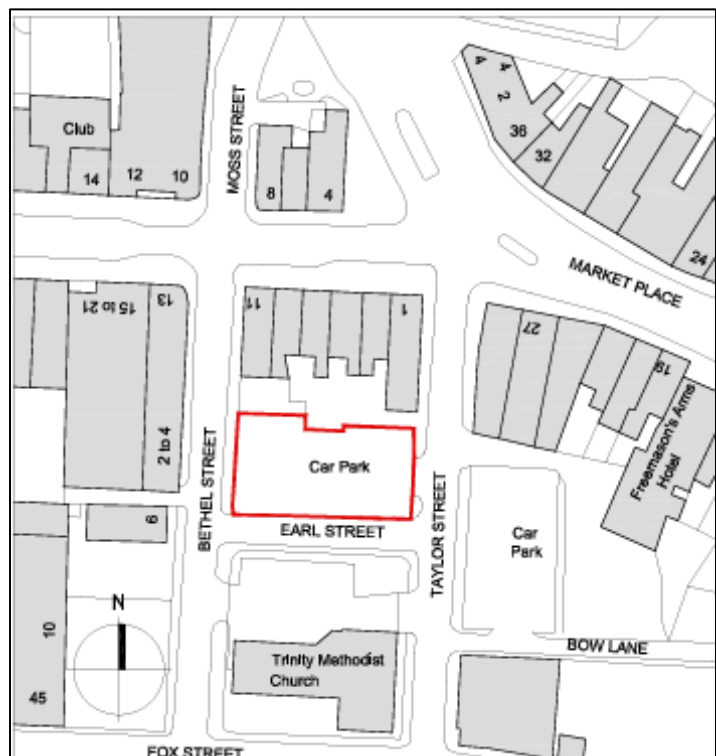
DESIGN

Scale

There are concerns regarding the overall height of the proposal. The building occupies a position within a row that is predominantly two storeys in height and is not located directly on the principal road frontage where a modest increase in scale may be more readily justified. In this context, the proposed height appears excessive and sits uncomfortably within the established pattern of development.

Whilst there may be some scope to consider residential accommodation within the existing building envelope and scale, the site is inherently constrained and does not readily lend itself to a four-storey form of development. Achieving such a scale places considerable pressure on design quality, residential amenity and the retention of the building's architectural character. It should also be noted that planning permission reference 23/00727/FUL related to the redevelopment of a cleared site and was therefore assessed within a materially different context. As such, limited weight should be afforded to direct comparisons between that scheme and the current proposal

Even with relaxation of separation distances, the distance between principal windows of habitable rooms is notably low but the case officer would be best to advise if this would be acceptable considering the planning context.



Context

Whilst the street contains a varied mix of building styles and differing design quality, a number of properties present blank or inactive elevations to the public realm. These should not be viewed as positive precedents. The application site itself currently suffers from a poor-quality ground floor frontage which detracts from the street scene, and redevelopment presents a clear opportunity to address this deficiency.

However, rather than drawing upon the strongest characteristics of the existing building, particularly the articulated brickwork, architectural detailing and vertical emphasis of the upper floors, the proposal appears to take influence from some of the weaker elements within the surrounding area. In doing so, it removes much of the visual interest and richness that currently contributes positively to the character of the building.



The proposal demonstrates a clear watering down of architectural detailing, resulting in a noticeably simplified appearance that falls short of what would reasonably be considered high-quality design.

The existing building possesses a number of attractive architectural features, including the red brick façade, arched window heads, decorative brick detailing, pronounced entrance and gable feature. Collectively, these elements provide a degree of character and visual interest that is absent from many neighbouring properties. The proposal largely eliminates these qualities and replaces them with a significantly simplified architectural treatment.

The resulting development gives the impression that the original building has effectively been demolished and replaced with a new structure, rather than sensitively converted or refurbished. The proposed architectural language appears largely indifferent to both the existing building and its surroundings, resulting in a development that loses much of the site's character and historic interest. In design terms,

the wrong approach appears to have been taken although I am willing to allow the Heritage Officer take the lead on this matter.

In considering the future of the site, it is acknowledged that converting the building to a wholly residential use presents challenges in retaining the existing façade composition. From a design perspective, the most successful solution would likely have been to retain a commercial use at ground floor level, allowing larger glazed openings and an active frontage to be maintained and improved. Residential accommodation above could then have capitalised upon the building's existing architectural features without requiring their removal. IF full residential use were considered acceptable, greater effort should have been made to develop a façade treatment that responds more directly to the original building, making better use of existing architectural cues such as lintels, cills and window proportions.

Conversion / New Build

Although the proposal is described as the conversion and refurbishment of an existing two-storey building, the extent of alterations is so substantial that it more closely resembles a new-build development. The proposal removes virtually all of the building's positive architectural features, including the entrance composition, first-floor detailing, fenestration patterns and roof form. Consequently, very little of the building's original character would remain.

Furthermore, the addition of two further storeys to the existing structure would typically require significant structural intervention, often involving new foundations or lightweight construction methods to the upper levels. There is limited information demonstrating how these matters would be addressed. While this is ultimately a technical consideration, it reinforces the extent to which the proposal departs from a straightforward conversion or refurbishment.