

HERITAGE & CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Application Details

Heritage, Conservation & Design team officer

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Date

1 October 2026

Application reference

PL/2026/0735

Address

Land to the northeast of Birch Business Park, Heywood

Proposal

Outline planning application (with all matters reserved other than access) for the construction of two industrial units (Use Classes B2 and B8) together with ancillary office space (Use Class E), with supporting loading bays, trailer bays, trailer park spaces, parking spaces, landscaping, infrastructure and other associated works

Affected Heritage Assets

Designated heritage assets

- Lower Whittle Farmhouse (grade II)

Non-designated heritage assets

- Broom Hill Farm
- High Fields Farm
- Stock Nook

Summary

The proposal would result in some harm to the significance of Broom Hill Farm and Stock Nook/Doctor Moss, because of the scale, height and proximity of the units. This harm should be weighed against any benefits stemming from the proposal. It is also noted that as this parcel has come forwards separately, rather than as part of the masterplan, as required by the policy. As such the cumulative impacts cannot be fully assessed.

Assessment

Site description and significance

The application site is a parcel of land to the northeast of Birch Business Park, which is understood to have historically been used for landfill. Birch Business Park was developed in the late 20th century. The Business Park has developed and expanded in recent years; including with the construction of new units. The application site is currently an open field, with a pond in the southwestern corner and mature landscaping around the edges. The site and the wider area are within PfE site allocation JP1.1 - Northern Gateway.

Historically the area was characterised by open farmland with isolated farmsteads dotting the landscape. These farmsteads include the grade II listed Lower Whittle Farmhouse and several non-designated heritage assets.

As part of the evidence base for Places for Everyone, a Historic Environment Assessment was carried out by Salford Archaeology (see attached). This provides an analysis of the affected designated and non-designated heritage assets, as well as providing recommendations for future development.

Lower Whittle Farmhouse is a timber framed, 17th century farmhouse (grade II). It was substantially rebuilt in the 18th century. It has surviving brick noggin and wattle and daub within the panels. The courtyard to the north of the farmhouse is depicted on the first edition OS map, dating from 1851. Beyond the historic farmstead are several 20th century agricultural buildings, as well as outside storage. These buildings and uses have eroded the immediate and wider agricultural setting. Key views of the farmhouse have been identified from the land immediately to its south and from the courtyard to the north. Despite unsympathetic development within its wider setting, it remains of special architectural and historic interest. Its significance stems in part from its architectural and aesthetic values. It is also of evidential value, from its surviving historic fabric and the relationship between the farmhouse and its historic agricultural buildings.

Broom Hill Farm lies to the south of Birch Business Park. The farm comprises a late 18th century, L-shaped granary and threshing barn, as well as the late 19th century farmhouse, labourer cottages and cowhouses. The remainder of the buildings date from the later 20th century. This farmstead is of both historic and architectural interest, as an example of an organically developed complex, with evidence for different farming processes and buildings of differing ages, with the survival of 18th century elements. Key views of the farmstead are from the east and west. Mature landscaping offers important screening between the farmstead and Birch Business Park. The Business Park also limits views from the north towards the farm.

Higher Fields farmhouse appears to date to the late 18th/early 19th century. It is brick built and set at right angles to the attached barn. There is also a late 19th century hay barn, which is used as a car garage. Despite alterations and later additions, it is a relatively complete example of a farmstead from the turn of the 19th century and is of high local significance. The farmstead's rural setting to the northwest and southwest make a minor positive contribution to its significance.

Stock Nook / Doctors Moss – Doctor's Moss appears to date from the turn of the 19th century, as an attached farmhouse and outbuilding. The buildings have been converted and heavily altered. They have also been renamed Stock Nook. Stock Nook Farm appears to have been rebuilt in the 20th

century. These farms are of local historic and architectural interest. The late 19th century outbuildings still have a strong relationship with their rural surroundings, particularly to the south.

Relevant legislation and planning policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

66(1) In considering whether to grant planning permission [...] for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority [...] shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2026)

Chapter 20 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Places for Everyone (PfE)

JP Allocation 1.1 Heywood / Pilsworth (Northern Gateway)

Policy JP-P2: Heritage

Rochdale Core Strategy

Policy P2: Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage

Assessment of proposals

The proposal is for the construction of two new industrial units on land to the northeast of Birch Business Park. The application is made in outline form, with all matters reserved. Some indicative details and parameters have been provided. The supporting planning statement confirms that the maximum combined floor area of the units would be 12241sqm. The units would have a maximum ridge height of 18m.

The site lies within JP Allocation 1.1 Heywood / Pilsworth (Northern Gateway). This site allocation seeks to provide around 1 200 000sqm of industrial and warehousing space, along with 1200 homes. It requires development within the allocation to be in accordance with a comprehensive masterplan, design code, infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy. Paragraph 13 and 14 of this policy allocation are relevant to the historic environment. Paragraph 13 requires appropriate account to be taken of relevant heritage assets, and their settings, including Lower Whittle Farmhouse.

Paragraph 14 requires a detailed assessment and evaluation of known and potential archaeological site, historic landscape features and built heritage assets to establish specific requirements for the protection and enhancement of significant heritage assets.

The proposed scheme relates only a small part of the allocation. There is a separate outline planning application in for most of the allocation and this includes a masterplan (25/00418/OUT refers). Clarification is needed on how the current proposal would fit into the wider masterplan.

The historic environment assessment carried out by Salford Archaeology makes recommendations in relation to the built environment.

These are as follows:

Lower Whittle Farmhouse - enshrine protection in policy/masterplan. Ensure development is not visually dominant and respects the rural character of the landscape; considerations of plan and design in open, agricultural landscape. Any development to the south, north and west of the farm complex should comprise low-rise buildings. Further screening could be incorporated into the design of the development to prevent views of the grade II listed building being affected, and to maintain the rural, isolated character of the farm complex.

Doctor's Moss / Stock Nook - The retention of the built heritage elements is recommended and screening enhanced, where appropriate around the residential elements. Considerations should also be given to the design, layout and views to respect the openness and rural nature of the setting. Enhanced screening could be implanted to maintain rural nature of setting

Broomhill - Retention of built heritage; Considerations of design, layout and views to respect the openness and rural nature of the setting

Higher Fields - It is recommended that the farm building and its immediate surroundings are maintained. Development within close proximity to the farm should respect the rural character of the farm in terms of size and density. Screening could also be implemented to screen modern development from views of the farm buildings.

The applicant has submitted a heritage statement, which identifies the heritage assets detailed above, as well as the Birch Village Conservation Area.

The heritage statement concludes that the proposed units would have a neutral impact on the significance of Whittle Farmhouse and Broom Hill Farm. The statement concludes that the development would result in a low level of harm to the significance of Higher Fields Farm and that there would be a negligible degree of harm to Stock Nook Farm.

The conclusions reached of Whittle Farmhouse and Broomhill Farm are not disputed. In the case of Lower Whittle Farm, the distance of separation, as well as the presence of the existing business park and modern agricultural buildings to the north and west of the farm limit the relationship the site plays with the setting of this listed building.

Broom Hill Farm is separated from the application site by the existing units at Birch Business Park. This modern business park dominates the views from to the north of this non-designated heritage asset. Development on the application site would be seen in the context of the existing Birch

Business Park. It is considered that the proposal would have a neutral impact on the setting of this asset.

Higher Fields is identified within the Salford Archaeology as being a relatively complete example of a late 18th / early 19th century farmstead and of high local significance. The recommendations made within the same report are proposed to minimise the impact on its setting. The proposed units lie to the southeast of the asset, where vegetation provides some screening. The proposed units would nevertheless introduce sizeable built form within what is currently undeveloped open fields. There would be some harm to the significance of the asset. Furthermore, as this parcel has come forwards in isolation, and the proposals for the intervening field are not known, the potential cumulative impacts on setting cannot be fully assessed.

Stock Nook / Doctor Moss are identified of being of local significance within the Salford Archaeology report. The proposed units would introduce built form into the wider rural setting of these non-designated heritage assets. This would result in a degree of harm to their significance. as with Broom Hill Farm, the treatment of the intervening fields is not known and as such the potential cumulative impacts on the setting of these assets cannot be fully assessed.

The impact of a development on the significance of non-designated heritage assets is a material planning consideration. A balanced judgement should be had, having regard to the scale of any harm or loss, the significance of the asset and any benefits stemming from the proposal.

Conclusions

The proposal would result in some harm to the significance of Broom Hill Farm and Stock Nook/Doctor Moss, because of the scale, height and proximity of the units. This harm should be weighed against any benefits stemming from the proposal. It is also noted that as this parcel has come forwards separately, rather than as part of the masterplan, as required by the policy. As such the cumulative impacts cannot be fully assessed.

Re-consultation

Yes