

APPLICATION REPORT – FUL/352095/23
Planning Committee 21 February 2024

Registration Date: 21st December 2023
Ward: Coldhurst

Application Reference: FUL/352095/23
Type of Application: Full

Proposal: Demolition of former Snipe Inn public house and redevelopment into public realm

Location: Snipe Inn, 29-31 Henshaw Street, Oldham, OL1 1NH

Case Officer: Graham Dickman
Applicant: Oldham Council
Agent: Emma Norman

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This application has been referred to Planning Committee for determination in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation as it is a Major application submitted by the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 It is recommended that the application be approved subject to the conditions set out in this report.

3. SITE DESCRIPTION

3.1 The application site relates to the vacant Snipe Inn public house which closed in November 2022. It fronts onto Henshaw Street to the west of the town centre. A narrow passage on the south side of the building leads to an open area providing access to Oldham Bus Station beyond, whilst on the north side it adjoins a neighbouring retail property.

3.2 The Henshaw Street frontage contains a further mix of retail uses with the Tommyfield Indoor Market opposite.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 The application seeks the demolition of the former public house building, which will subsequently open up links between the pedestrianised town centre and the bus station.

4.2 As a result of the demolition, the gable wall of the adjoining building to the north will be exposed. This will be repaired and rendered with buttress supports in brick.

- 4.3 The redevelopment of the site will also see the introduction of new soft and hard landscaping.
- 4.4 The footprint of the former Snipe Inn will be formed of large format Yorkstone flats with snipe feet interpretation inlaid into the paving in brass.
- 4.5 There will be a new full depth footway formed from Yorkstone setts which will extend from the east to the west of the site, connecting the bus station and Cheapside to Henshaw Street.
- 4.6 Lighting on the site will consist of 5 street lighting columns located to ensure light coverage across the entire site. This light coverage will ensure all pathways and landscaped areas will be illuminated to improve safety.

5. PLANNING HISTORY

FUL/351243/23 - Change of use and associated development to create a new public open space at Rock Street. Approved 22 September 2023

6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

- 6.1 The Joint Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document adopted in 2011 (the Local Plan) is the relevant document for this type of proposal within the adopted Development Plan for Oldham. The site is allocated within the Central Shopping Core of the Town Centre on the Proposals Map associated with the Local Plan.
- 6.2 The following policies are considered relevant to the determination of this application:
 - Policy 1 - Climate Change and Sustainable Development;
 - Policy 5 - Promoting Accessibility and Sustainable Transport;
 - Policy 9 – Local Environment;
 - Policy 15 – Centres;
 - Policy 20 – Design;
 - Policy 21 – Protecting Natural Environmental Assets;
 - Policy 23 – Open Spaces and Sports;
 - Policy 24 - Historic Environment; and,
 - Saved Oldham UDP Policy D1.5 – Protection of Trees on Development Sites.
- 6.3 Part of the site is located within the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area

7. CONSULTATIONS

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| Highways Officer | No objections |
| Greater Manchester Ecology Unit | No objections subject to conditions in relation to protection of birds and bats. |
| Trees Officer | No objections |

8. PUBLICITY AND THIRD-PARTY REPRESENTATIONS

- 8.1 In accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, and the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement, the application has been advertised by neighbour notification letters, display of a site notice, and publication of a press notice.
- 8.2 In response, no representations have been received.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSAL

9. PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 The proposed development forms an integral part of the Council's 'Creating a Better Place' plan to transform Oldham town centre, unlocking investment and creating new homes and jobs. As part of the strategy, the scheme also aims to improve movement around the town centre, especially for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 9.2 The redevelopment of the application site represents an important element in facilitating these objectives.
- 9.3 At the heart of the wider redevelopment will be a new 2.3 hectare (5.7 acre) park. This will emerge onto Henshaw Street opposite the present application site where improved direct links through to the bus station will be made available.
- 9.4 A visual structural inspection of the building was undertaken in April 2023, and a Structural Inspection Report has been submitted as part of this application.
- 9.5 The report highlights that the building is showing the signs of its age with uneven floors and deflected roof structure. A specific concern is raised regarding a section of the ceiling above bedroom 2 which has partially collapsed. The report states that an inspection of the loft room above revealed a substantial amount of brick rubble and a quantity of stacked bricks which appear to be supported directly off the ceiling in this area. This will be imposing considerable weight to the ceiling and as such the area is currently considered to be unsafe. General cracking and ageing have been identified across other areas of the building.
- 9.6 Whilst the building may be capable of renovation, the costs involved are likely to

significantly reduce its viability.

- 9.7 The demolition of the public house will therefore result in the loss of a community facility that (if the building underwent a costly renovation) could potentially be retained as a viable business. However, this must be weighed alongside the wider community benefits which would be generated from the enhancement of the site and improved accessibility to the town centre.

10. DESIGN AND HERITAGE

- 10.1 Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that, with respect to conservation areas, special attention should be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.
- 10.2 It is therefore necessary for an assessment of the heritage implications of the development to be undertaken.
- 10.3 The application site is located at the northern edge of the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area, which was extended to incorporate the area of the application site following the adoption of the Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan in August 2019.
- 10.4 This Appraisal identified the Snipe as making a positive contribution, along with the neighbouring buildings to the south. These neighbouring buildings are noted to include carved-and-painted sandstone capitals and corbel brackets depicting different trades. The Snipe itself has an individual scale and design to the neighbouring block and is devoid of such decorative features.
- 10.5 By contrast, the adjoining shops to the north are identified as having either a neutral or detracting impact on the area.
- 10.6 The Appraisal states that *“Future town centre development proposals in Oldham Council regeneration initiatives should consider opportunities to enhance the character of the conservation area and its setting through the provision of solutions to address buildings and sites which are identified as making a negative contribution to the conservation area and to support the reuse of vacant heritage assets”*.
- 10.7 It also advises that *“A public realm strategy should be developed and routes into and across the conservation area made central to future development proposals and regeneration initiatives” and that changes should...improve wayfinding into and around the conservation area, between key transport links and better define the conservation area”*.
- 10.8 NPPF paragraph 201 states that *“Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal”*.
- 10.9 The application is accompanied by a Heritage Assessment report which states that the demolition of the Snipe Inn will result in some minor loss of heritage value given that the building has been part of the streetscape since the mid-19th century.

- 10.10 As a consequence, it is considered that the proposal will result in 'less than substantial harm' to the character of the Conservation Area.
- 10.11 NPPF paragraph 208 states that "*Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use*".
- 10.12 Paragraph 210 states further that "*Local planning authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred*".
- 10.13 In this instance, finance from the Future High Streets Fund has been obtained for the development, and therefore, it is anticipated that the redevelopment, following the demolition of the existing building, will be undertaken in the next few months.

11. HIGHWAY ISSUES

- 11.1 The proposals will result in improved access for pedestrians. The existing taxi rank which adjoins the site will be re-located to the north to the area alongside the Tommyfield public house as agreed with the Licensing team.
- 11.2 The Highways Officer is satisfied that consideration has been made for the servicing requirements of existing businesses on Henshaw Street so that there will be little conflict between motorised vehicles and pedestrians.
- 11.3 As a result, it is not considered that there will be any adverse impact on highway safety.

12. AMENITY IMPACTS

- 12.1 There are no residential properties in close proximity to the site and therefore no impact on residential amenity.
- 12.2 At present visitors to the town centre emerging from the bus station have the option of using the passageway which adjoins the southern side of the existing building. However, this is narrow, dark, and during inclement weather can become waterlogged in places. It therefore limits use by all visitors and presents a poor standard of amenity for users.
- 12.3 By contrast, the proposed enhancement of the area will create a safe and attractive approach to and from the town centre.
- 12.4 The proposed paths and dwell spaces provide natural passive surveillance that will also help to improve safety for users.

13. ECOLOGY AND LANDSCAPING

- 13.1 At present the site includes a couple of small trees and associated shrubbery. The redevelopment will see the introduction of increased tree and shrub planting across the whole site, which will be incorporated into the proposed hard landscaping. 5 trees

will be required to be removed to be replaced by 28 from a variety of species.

- 13.2 The Council's Tree Officer has raised no objections to the proposals.
- 13.3 Consequently, there will be benefits to biodiversity as a result of the proposals.
- 13.4 A Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment has been undertaken. The existing building was assessed as having low bat roosting potential, due to the potential roost features likely only able to support a small number of opportunistic bats at any given time. Furthermore, it was determined that the building was unlikely to support a large number of bats on a regular basis, or a roost of high conservation value such as a maternity or hibernation roost, due to the small size and exposed nature of the potential roost features.
- 13.5 Nevertheless, it is recommended that, if the building is to be demolished outside of the bat survey season, i.e. between October and April inclusive, this should be undertaken under a method statement and supervision by a suitably qualified ecologist. Outside this period, nocturnal bat surveys will be required before the works can take place.
- 13.6 GMEU has considered these details and has no objection subject to the imposition of a condition that if demolition is to take place before May 2024, this can be undertaken subject to a Method Statement and supervision by a suitably qualified ecologist.

14. DRAINAGE

- 14.1 Details of proposed surface water drainage have been submitted with the application. Surface water will drain via existing or proposed gulleys or will infiltrate into the ground within the soft landscaped areas.
- 14.2 The details are therefore considered to be acceptable and will be introduced as part of the works.

15. CONCLUSION

- 15.1 The proposed redevelopment will result in the removal of an undesignated heritage asset which is in a poor state of repair and has been subject to modifications over time.
- 15.2 The proposal has been identified as delivering numerous public benefits, including:
- The creation of high-quality, safe and well-designed public realm;
 - Creation of a safe, permeable public connection, encouraging the use of sustainable transportation;
 - Enhancement of the character of the local area and wider area, including enhancing the conservation area, through the creation of a high quality designed public realm which includes proposals to reference the location of the former Snipe Inn;
 - Lighting to create a safe and accessible environment all year round;
 - Soft planting and landscaping (including the planting of 28 trees), with environmental, ecological and mental health benefits; and,

- Provision of two bat boxes on site.

15.3 On this basis, it is considered that significant weight should be attached to the positive benefits of the proposals which would make efficient use of land, formerly used as a public house, into a landscaped public realm for use by members of the public.

16. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS

1. The development must be begun not later than the expiry of THREE years beginning with the date of this permission. REASON - To comply with the provisions of Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
2. The development hereby approved shall be fully implemented in accordance with the Approved Details Schedule list on this decision notice. REASON - For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans and specifications.
3. No demolition hereby approved shall commence until a Method Statement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, which shall include arrangements for supervision by a suitably qualified ecologist and include a search for bats prior to works commencing, including lifted rooftiles, damaged soffits and damaged walls/ceilings within the building. Should demolition take place after May 2024, no work shall commence until nocturnal bat surveys have confirmed that no bat roosts are present. REASON – In order to ensure the protection of bats which may be utilising the building having regard to Policy 21 of the Oldham Local Plan.
4. All hard and soft landscape works, including the siting of the proposed bat boxes, shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans in accordance with a timeframe to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter any trees or shrubs which die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased within a period of five years from the completion of the development shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size, number and species to comply with the approved plan unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. REASON - To ensure that the landscaping scheme is carried out and protected in the interests of visual amenity and to safeguard the future appearance of the area having regard to Policies 9, 20 and 21 of the Oldham Local Plan, and saved Policy D1.5 of the Unitary Development Plan.
5. No works to trees or shrubs shall take place between the 1st March and 31st August in any year unless a detailed bird nest survey by a suitably experienced ecologist has been carried out immediately prior to clearance and written confirmation provided that no active bird nests are present which has been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. REASON - To ensure the protection of bird habitats, which are protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 having regard to Policy 21 of the Oldham Local Plan.

