

## 5 Design Principles

### Introduction

- 5.1 The value of good design is recognised in Rochdale as being essential to the development and regeneration of the town centre. A poor quality environment is both economically and socially unacceptable. New development can make a vital contribution to the regeneration of the town centre and to the quality of life of those who visit, work and live there. In particular, new development which is well-planned, designed and managed will play a key role in fostering a prosperous community in which people enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and attractive town centre.
- 5.2 Rochdale town centre has a history of change, from placing the River Roch in culvert in the early 20th century to the post-war clearance of back-to-back terraced housing and redundant industrial buildings. In the latter part of the 20th century, more dramatic change occurred in the east area of the town centre. Whilst this new infrastructure and architecture may have resulted in increased retail and commercial activity and ease of access for motorised vehicles, it also produced a townscape that now falls short in terms of a quality urban environment that people enjoy to be in.

Figure 6 Transformation of Rochdale Town Centre from 1854 to present day



- 5.3 Urban centres often change over time as new infrastructure and architecture is needed to reflect changes in the economy and wider society. Unfortunately in Rochdale Town Centre East, the new infrastructure and development of the 1970s became a barrier to pedestrian movement, reduced legibility and constrained retail development to the south. With new development, it is particularly important to make it easy for pedestrians to find

their way around by recognising desire lines without resorting to extensive signage. In addition, an area's buildings through their design and layout can help people know where they are and where to go. A building should be designed to help people recognise what it is for, what goes on inside and how to enter it, a key design idea that has been lost in recent decades. All new architecture should avoid the harsh designs of 1960s and 70s and the kitsch 1980s and 90s which detrimentally altered the face of the area. It should be rich, have depth and be attractive to look at, especially at street level to enhance the experience of pedestrians.

- 5.4 Rochdale Town Centre East has an interesting topography, but much of the natural ground forms and slopes have been ignored with more recent development. Buildings should be designed to reflect, rather than ignore natural changes in level. In addition, it is important to avoid development that is too large and out of scale with the historic town centre. Large sites should be broken down into smaller, more comprehensible, human scale developments.
- 5.5 Traditionally, towns were composed of blocks of buildings with streets around them. Redevelopment schemes in the past have tended to destroy this familiar urban form and the results have been largely unsatisfactory, particularly in Rochdale Town Centre East. As vacant, redundant and unsatisfactory sites are redeveloped, the opportunity should be taken to create real streets again with proper active frontages to make a tight-knit urban fabric where public space and landscape is integrated rather than just being leftover space that is no use to anyone. Finally, a vibrant mixed-use area that does not die once the shops and offices close is a basic requirement of a successful and attractive town centre.

### How to Use this Design Guidance

- 5.6 The following design principles and guidance MUST be read in conjunction with Rochdale's Unitary Development Plan and the Oldham and Rochdale Design Guides (Urban Design, Public Realm and Residential). This SPD seeks not to repeat the general design guidance found in these documents, but addresses issues specific to Rochdale Town Centre East and how the Design Principles should be implemented in terms of design across the area. More specific design guidance for each of the Character Areas can be found in Chapter 7.

### Design Principles

- 5.7 In creating a successful town centre, the Town Centre East area should:

#### 1. Be Vibrant

A successful town centre needs to be more than just a random collection of shops and offices in a central location. It is the composition of the overall urban fabric and the mix of uses within it that help create a distinctive sense of place and vibrancy.

- Creating a mix of land uses across the area and in particular returning residential land uses to the area is key to a successful future, delivering activity and 'life' outside of shopping and office hours.
- New development should bring forward a 'mix' of complementary activities avoiding blocks of different uses as exist now and seek to integrate uses into each of the character areas and individual buildings albeit with different emphasis.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES



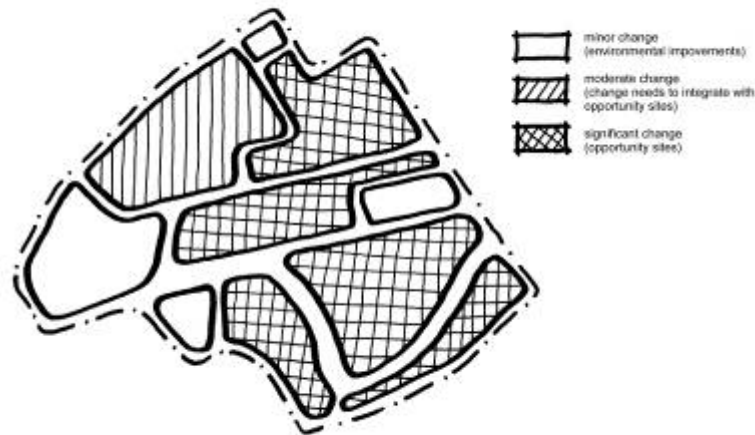
- Where possible, particularly in the re-use of historic buildings, vertical mixed use will be encouraged (active ground floor use with office or residential above). Although often difficult to achieve, the benefits are great, particularly in terms of natural surveillance of the street. Achieving other uses above the ground floor normally requires separate entrances and vertical circulation to be provided.
- Vibrancy and activity also comes from the public realm and in creating new streets and spaces in the area, a range of scales and functions should be provided for. In town centre locations the multi-functional use of spaces can also add vitality. A good example of this currently is the use of the Butts for specialist markets and events.

### 2. Be Distinctive

Places that are distinctive are generally memorable and popular and the appearance of the built environment defines an area's character helps create a sense of place. 'Anywhere' development and standard designs brought in from elsewhere do not create a sense of place.

- Given the level of change that will potentially be occurring in the area there is the potential to build a new distinctiveness and sense of place.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES



- There are a number of design 'markers' for this distinctiveness:
  - Addressing the riverside - the only open riverside in the town centre and a valuable open space and ecological resource
  - Making creative use of the significant topography and maintaining views to the surrounding hills
  - Reflecting the finer urban grain and human scale of Yorkshire Street and the area around the Butts in new development
- New buildings should reinforce the sense of place/distinctiveness of the area, reflecting the scale, features and materials of the best of the existing character and quality in a contemporary way. The setting of the existing listed buildings and conservation area should be enhanced.
- The use of local materials and colours are a key means of reinforcing the area's identity. Integrating local influences within a development can further add to its distinctiveness and relate to elements such as ironwork, stained glass, brickwork, masonry and paving. Incorporating public art, that is not an afterthought but is an integral part of a comprehensive development, can also make a place memorable.

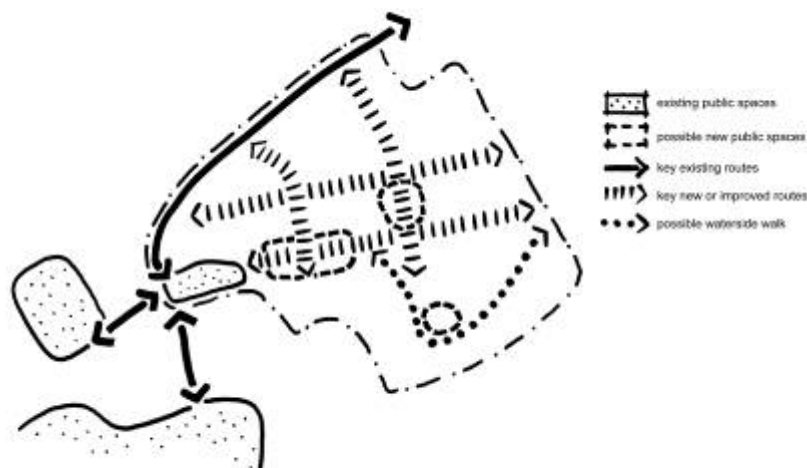
### 3. Have Attractive Spaces and Buildings

A quality built environment is not only pleasant to be in, it also economically more valuable and is more likely to be successful as a place.

- There is only one major open space within the area, which is the Butts. Recent development elsewhere has tended to turn its back on the public realm with blank facades and inactive frontage.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- The redevelopment of large parts of the area in the future will provide the opportunity to create a new network of spaces that will help reinforce legibility, reflect local character and be connected by a hierarchy of streets.



- Built form needs to respond sensitively to reflect the urban grain, scale, permeability and movement patterns within the area and provide active frontage to the public realm. The continued development of inward looking 'mega' or 'super blocks' should be avoided to achieve a greater sense of place appropriate to Rochdale town centre. A 'mega' or 'super block' is an amalgamation of a number of traditional scaled blocks with no public routes through.
- Scale and massing are critical to the design of new buildings in town centres. Single storey built form that has no presence or active frontage onto the street, such as that currently found in the area, does little to create a sense of enclosure or aid legibility and should be avoided.
- The scale of new built development should generally respond to its context and major or abrupt changes in height should be avoided whilst creating an interesting roofscape. In the town centre this means predominantly 2-3 storeys on shopping streets and rising up to 5 storeys on main streets will be most appropriate. However, there is also the need to aid legibility by creating new landmarks and in a small number of locations, a landmark high quality design building of greater height may be appropriate. If a higher element is proposed, its impact on the street should be carefully considered and whether it may be appropriate for it to step back from the building line.
- Service yards should be designed so that they are not highly visible or obtrusive and do not detract from the street scene. They should be designed so that only the access is visible from the street by either using changes in level to create 'underground' servicing, creating rear servicing or by screening.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- In working with the topography of the area, buildings or blocks should be stepped to work with the slopes and avoid creating significant issues of scale. Design should respond to the topography rather than disguise it. In addition, the nature of the topography means that roofs on the lower slopes will be visible from above and should be specifically considered in terms of their design.



Small building blocks respond to topography creating a varied and balanced townscape.



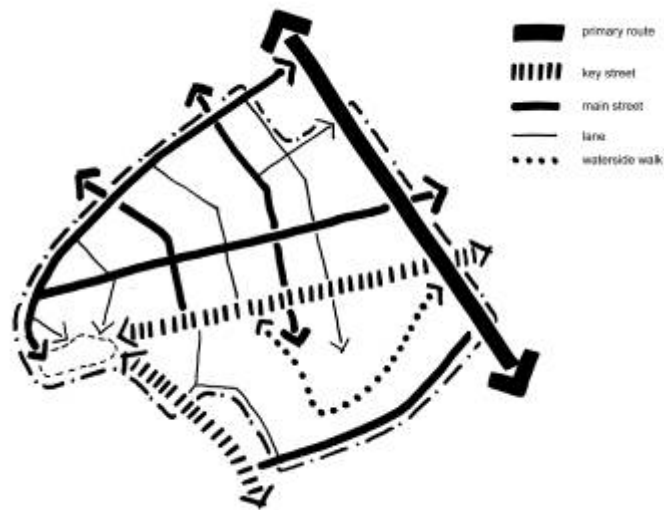
Block does not respond to topography creating issues of scale and an unbalanced townscape.

#### 4. Have Good Access through It

A well connected place is most often a successful place. However, this does not mean that increasing levels of traffic should be accommodated. Walking, cycling and public transport should be encouraged and promoted throughout the area and 'traffic should be made to fit the town, not the town fit the traffic'.

- Movement within the area for all modes is currently difficult for a number of reasons; the dominance of the car, the separation of pedestrians from the street and the scale of modern development blocks all hinder movement & legibility.
- The key to access and movement is to promote other modes and then deal with the remaining cars in a way which does not result in free-flow solutions, using precious land and causing problems of severance (i.e. current gyratory around bus station). The street should be a public space which promotes walking and interaction and the quality of the street environment should come first.
- A new hierarchy of streets within the area is required that reflects desire lines and visual links and encourages and supports movement on foot. The separation of pedestrians from the street, whether above, below or with over engineered guardrails should be avoided. Particular attention needs to be paid to strengthening connections between the Primary Shopping Area and the adjoining locations.
- On main streets, traffic flow and public transport is an important consideration, but care must be taken that vehicles and measures to accommodate them do not dominate. On the high streets and secondary streets, vehicles speeds should be low, access restricted and pedestrians given priority where possible. Pedestrian priority does not necessarily mean full pedestrianisation, which needs to be carefully considered over a wide area as it can create problems if levels of activity drop, particularly in the evening.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES



- Easy and convenient 'access for all' will be required and carefully integrated into all new development and areas of public realm. Level entrances, dropped kerbs, tactile paving and signage and contrasting materials for surfacing and street furniture should all be incorporated seamlessly into the built environment. Although the use of stairs may be necessary in places due the significant changes in level, alternative and convenient level access either by ramp or lift should also be provided to comply with the latest DDA standards.

### 5. Be Safe

A successful town centre will be one that is perceived as being a safe and enjoyable place to be. Good design can reduce opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour and the fear of these. However, a balanced approach is required, as overt security measures, such as roller shutters on ground floor windows and no planting in the public realm, can have a negative impact on the quality of the street.

- An active mix of uses that front onto the street will increase natural surveillance of the public realm. Too many streets in Rochdale Town Centre East have no active frontages along them and rely solely on passing traffic for surveillance.
- Pedestrians should not be separated from the street, either above or below, as this reduces activity on the ground.
- Few people currently live in the town centre and new residential development will ensure a 24hr presence across the area.
- Security and safety should be paramount in the design of new car parks in the area. They should be welcoming and give motorists confidence about leaving their vehicles. All car parks should be well related to their surrounding uses in line with the Council's car parking strategy and section 8 of this SPD.

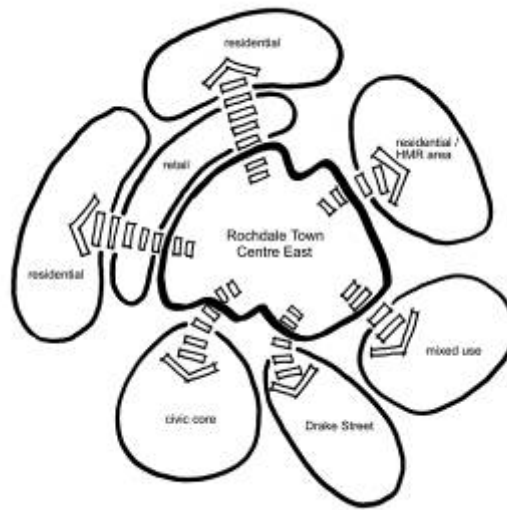
## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- As well as making Rochdale Town Centre East a visually attractive place after dark, lighting can have a positive benefit in terms of reducing actual crime and the fear of crime. Recent Government research confirms that good levels of street lighting have more impact on reducing crime and the fear of crime than the wide spread introduction of CCTV (Home Office Research Studies 251 and 252 August 2002).
- Good street lighting means pedestrians can see and be seen and there should be good facial recognition at a distance of at least 10m for it to be an effective deterrent to crime, particularly personal attack. New street lighting must not only be brighter to be effective, but the quality of the light must also be considered. Metal halide lamps provide the best colour rendition and orange biased low pressure sodium the worst.

### 6. Be Easy to Get To

Regardless of the quality of the redevelopment, if Rochdale Town Centre East is difficult to get to, it will not be a success. Considering the large numbers of people within easy walking distance of the town centre, the area should be promoted as a 'walk in' district. Once there, it is also important to create a sense of arrival.

- Effectively integrating a new public transport interchange in the form of Metrolink and a new bus station should ensure that the area maximises the potential of public transport and acts as a gateway for Rochdale. These two key pieces of infrastructure should be closely integrated via a new space and connected to the new street hierarchy and pedestrian environment to ensure ease of movement & safety. Although this will be a busy area with many movements through it (both pedestrian and public transport), it should not be 'over engineered' to the detriment of the quality of the public space. This interchange will form a key point of arrival in Rochdale and as such it is important that it is well connected with the attractions of the Town Centre East area and the wider town centre.
- Externally, the area must be well connected with its surroundings in ensuring a 'walkable' town centre environment. In creating a successful 'piece of Rochdale' there is a fundamental need to better connect the area. Key issues to overcome include:
  - Significant changes in topography
  - Physical and psychological barriers created by heavily trafficked roads
  - Little activity and decline in fringe areas that must be traversed



### 7. Be Adaptable

It is difficult to predict the future and the layout of streets and design of buildings should be flexible and adaptable as change over time is inevitable. Although buildings may come and go in a relatively short period, the established pattern of streets and spaces will likely last for generations.

- This is a significant issue for the area today, as many 'modern' buildings have now outlived their original use and are difficult to adapt for new uses or changing requirements.
- In Rochdale Town Centre East, ground floor units on shopping streets should be able to accommodate a variety of retail and leisure uses and even a change of use to office. Upper floors should be adaptable for office or residential use. The depth of office floor plates should be carefully considered to allow for future conversion to residential (9-13m is optimum).
- Buildings and open spaces in areas at risk of flooding should be designed to accommodate rising river levels in consultation with the Environment Agency. Measures may include non habitable rooms on the ground floor and waterproof or resilient construction.
- In planning for and designing new buildings, adaptability and flexibility in the streets and spaces should also be built into the design in line with the Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide.

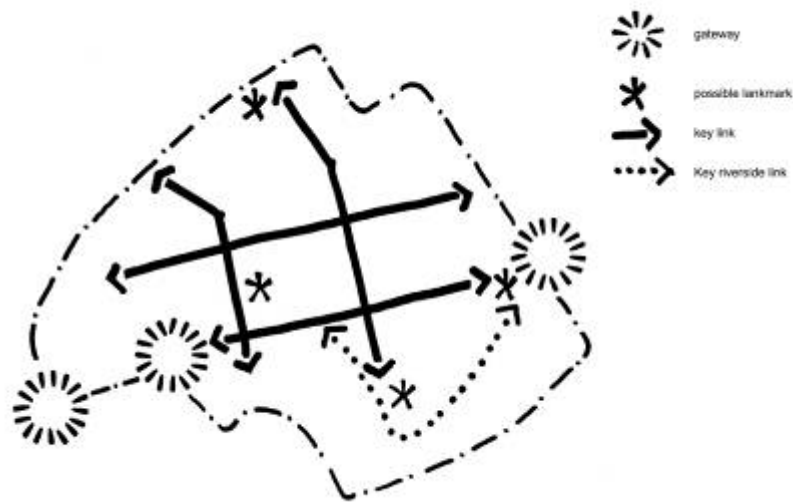
### 8. Be Legible

People should be able to 'read' a place and instinctively find their way about. They do this by picking up clues from the built environment, such as the width of the street (wide=important), levels of activity (busy=important), scale (larger/taller=centre), etc. When these universal clues are missing or reversed, people get lost.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- It is currently difficult to orientate oneself within the area with little in the way of legible street pattern, few landmarks and a confusing mix of levels and routes.
- In improving legibility, visual connectivity is key and views need to be opened up and /or maintained as follows:
  - Views up and down Penn Street and Bell Street
  - Views to and along the River Roch
  - Views across the Butts to the town hall tower
  - View across the Butts along Smith Street to the distant hills
- New development should seek to create greater permeability by providing new linkages through the area and with adjoining areas that will ensure both variety and legibility.
- Strong edges create good definition of streets and spaces with active, lively frontages. The strong edges in the Town Centre East include the Butts, Yorkshire Street and John Street. Weak edges present poor frontages and fail to properly define and contain streets and spaces. Weak edges erode the town's special character and undermine the visual strength of important places. Examples of weak edges in the Town Centre East are on Smith Street, Baillie Street, Penn Street and the Riverside.
- The coarse urban grain in the east of the area does little to reinforce a sense of place or create legibility. A finer urban grain is required that will be reflected in a new street hierarchy. Built form should be designed to front streets and spaces, relating to the street hierarchy and reinforcing character.
- Landmarks and marker buildings are essential to the town's identity and are crucial in aiding legibility. Rochdale Town Hall is the town's major landmark building. Within the Town Centre East, the Municipal Offices and existing bus station are arguably secondary marker buildings and new high quality marker buildings will be required in the area.
- New landmarks and focal points will aid legibility and will draw users through the area. Key locations for these will be:
  - near the existing 'black box' to counter balance the town hall tower
  - the riverside
  - the transport interchange

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES



- The design of new buildings should also aid legibility. Simple features such as ensuring that entrances are obvious, appropriately scaled and welcoming should be incorporated into the design.

### 9. Be Sustainable

A sustainable and 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to development that makes use of current best practice to make it more energy and resource efficient is encouraged in Rochdale Town Centre East.

- Efficiency begins with the overall layout of the area, which should be efficient in the use of land by ensuring that the urban form is compact, and of a density that maximises the potential of the area whilst protecting natural assets such as the River Roch. A well connected layout will also encourage the use of non-car modes of transport, such as walking and cycling and support public transport.
- Considering the issue of the risk of flooding from the River Roch in the lower parts of the site, where practical, sustainable urban drainage measures should be incorporated to control the discharge of surface water. This could range from incorporating swales and balancing areas into public spaces to specifying permeable paving. In addition, 'green roofs', can significantly reduce the speed and volume of run off, in addition to supporting biodiversity and improving the view from above, a particular consideration in an area with significant changes in level.
- Although Rochdale Town Centre East will be a high density urban area, new development should positively contribute to the greening of the built environment and support biodiversity. This can be achieved in a variety of ways from incorporating soft landscape elements such as planting and trees to providing suitable nesting and roosting structures for birds and bats where appropriate.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### 10. Have Sustainable Buildings

All buildings will have an environmental impact or footprint, but this should be reduced or minimised through good design in Rochdale Town Centre East.

- Individual buildings should be efficient in their use of energy and water by incorporating energy and water saving devices, together with renewable energy technologies. Wherever possible, sustainable building materials and techniques should be employed during the construction phase.
- Building orientation and design should respond to passive solar gain as appropriate, as generally, commercial buildings will require shading whilst residential buildings will want to maximise passive solar gain by being within 15 degrees of an east-west axis. In addition, there are significant opportunities in this respect for the area given the topography and the southern aspect of many of the opportunity sites.
- Renewable energy technology should be carefully integrated with the architecture and not added on as an after thought.
- The following minimum sustainability criteria will be applied to all individual buildings in the SPD area:

BUILDING TYPE	RATING SCHEME	STANDARD
Residential	NHER (National Home Energy Rating)	9
	Code for Sustainable Homes	Level 3
Office	BREEAM for Offices	Very Good
Retail	BREEAM 2-91	Very Good

Other types of development and mixed use schemes may require bespoke BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) criteria.

### 11. Be Maintainable

Investment in Rochdale Town Centre East will be for nothing if it is not maintained. Responsibility for the future maintenance of buildings and spaces should be considered at the start of the design process. A management plan should be developed through the process to ensure the highest quality is maintained throughout the life of the project.

- Public Realm in the town centre should be of the highest quality reflecting the significance of the location. The Council have already set out a palette of materials for the Yorkshire Street area and this should be reflected across the remainder of the site as a basic standard, whilst allowing for some variation within the different character areas.
- In planning for public realm improvements and redevelopment, the Council will seek to ensure sufficient monies are made available through new development for future maintenance of public and private spaces in the area. In achieving this end contributions may be sought.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### Key UDP Policies – Design

- G/BE/1 'Design Quality'
- BE/2 'Design Criteria for New Development'
- BE/5 'Shop Fronts'
- BE/6 'Art in the Environment'
- BE/7 'Street Furniture and the Public Realm'
- BE/8 'Landscaping in New Development'
- BE/11 'Protection of Locally Important Buildings and Features of Architectural and Historic Interest'
- BE/17 'New Development Affecting Conservation Areas'
  
- Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guides SPD

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES