

Historic England
Listing Team North
Historic England
37 Tanner Row
York

30 March 2017

Listing and Designation application for College Bank Estate, Rochdale, HE Application Reference: 1444789

Dear Sir / Madam,

I write in connection with the above planning application. College Bank Flats is under considerable threat of demolition from its owners, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH), and I therefore wish to offer my support to the proposed listing for the following reasons.

College Bank Flats consists of seven tower blocks providing homes for over 750 residents. Affectionately known as the 'Seven Sisters', the estate is an iconic part of Rochdale's landscape that contributes to the town's identity. The flats are in good condition but are in need of better management. They are one of the North West's best architectural examples of post-war mass housing, similar to London's Barbican estate in scale and historical importance.

College Bank Flats are of importance to the nation's social history. They were the show piece of the Government's slum-clearance programme in Rochdale at a time of widespread housing shortages in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The flats are therefore an example of a regional solution to what was a national problem. The flats are of special historic and architectural interest as they form a rare example of large-scale post-war mass housing. They also contain a number of original post-war murals which on their own are of cultural and historic importance. With some attention to colour schemes and maintenance, College Bank Flats can fit in with the local landscape.

Rochdale is a market town situated in the North West, and its unique character is reflected in the large number of buildings granted planning protection and their wide historic and current uses. Some of Rochdale's most iconic buildings, such as the Church of St Mary-in-the-Baum, have rightly been granted listed status. College Bank Flats is an essential part of Rochdale's historic environment, dominating the skyline for miles around, and is just as deserving of planning protection as the many other protected buildings in Rochdale.

Rochdale Council's Local Plan, adopted October 2016, has set a target of providing 460 additional homes per year in order to meet demand and help regenerate the borough. College Bank Flats provides 761 homes which, if demolished, would set back the Council's housing strategy by several years.

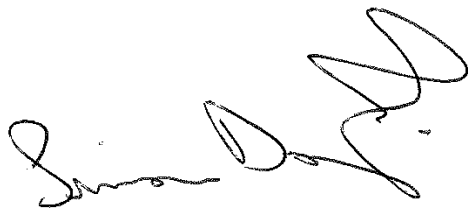
Significantly, the demolition of College Bank Flats would yield very little land for development, meaning that unless further high-rises were built, the number of homes built would be less than the number which already exist. Further, to reclaim the number of homes that College Bank Flats provided, extensive development would have to be built on the green belt, potentially more than the "limited use of greenfield sites" that the Local Plan allocates.

The Local Plan also recognises that a key challenge facing Rochdale is “addressing problems in inner urban areas and socially rented estates as a priority despite increasingly limited funding for intervention and regeneration”. As an urban area consisting of socially rented housing, the demolition of College Bank Flats would be contrary to the Council’s housing strategy, and indeed the protection of the buildings is supported by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Richard Farnell.

There is substantial appetite not only from myself but in the wider local area for the protection of College Bank Flats from any development which involves demolition. Robin Parker, who has submitted the above application, is both a long-term resident of the flats and is the former mayor of Rochdale. There is also a Twitter account, Save College Bank, which is campaigning to save the flats. I am also collecting the views of residents, and would be happy to share these with you.

Conclusively, the reasons for supporting the application are three-fold. Of primary importance is the need to ensure an adequate supply of housing for Rochdale’s constituents. Social housing is particularly important for many of my constituents, and demolishing College Bank Flats would do nothing either for them or the wider housing crisis. Secondly, the buildings themselves are intrinsic to Rochdale’s identity. They form the most prominent aspect on the town’s skyline and are an excellent architectural example of post-war mass-housing. Thirdly, there is substantial support among my constituents for protecting the buildings from demolition. On these merits, I believe that College Bank Flats are worth protecting.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Danczuk', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Simon Danczuk
Rochdale’s Member of Parliament