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Oldham School Building to Become Mixed-Use Development

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A disused school building in Oldham, known as Denton House, is set to be transformed into a house of multiple occupancy (HMO), a one-bedroom flat, and a retail unit following planning approval on 9 July. The decision, which has sparked local controversy, will see the former Hulme Grammar School site on Windsor Road repurposed, despite significant objections from residents.

According to planning documents, Denton House previously served as classrooms and a laboratory for the school, though its educational use ended some time ago. The approved plans outline three distinct developments: a one-bedroom flat with ground-floor access at the front, a five-bedroom HMO on the first floor with new side-entrance stairs, and a retail unit on the ground floor featuring a new shop front.

The planning officer's report argues that the project aligns with broader regeneration goals, citing social and environmental benefits. These include the reuse of a vacant site with good public transport links and access to local amenities, as well as the creation of short-term construction jobs. The officer also claimed the development would enhance "community vitality" through its residential and commercial elements. However, these assertions have been met with scepticism from locals, who question the need for yet another shop in an area already saturated with over 40 retail units within a half-mile radius.

Despite 15 objections from residents, the plans were greenlit. Concerns raised included noise from the proposed shop, fears of increased antisocial behaviour, and significant worries about parking and congestion. Residents described parking as a "daily issue" in the area, a concern echoed by Oldham Council's highways engineer, who flagged "serious concerns" about the strain on already limited on-street parking. The planning officer dismissed these fears, noting the shop's "small scale" and the site's access to public transport. The absence of specific parking standards in council policy was also cited, with the officer concluding that the development would not severely impact highway safety.

To address some objections, conditions were imposed. The shop's operating hours are restricted to 8 am – 8 pm, and walls separating the retail unit from residential spaces must be insulated to mitigate noise. Yet, these measures have done little to quell local unease, with many feeling their concerns were inadequately addressed.

The approval has raised questions about the balance between development and community needs, particularly in an area where infrastructure is already stretched. Critics argue that the Labour-led council's push for regeneration often overlooks practical challenges, such as parking and over-commercialisation, which could further strain local resources.

This redevelopment marks a new chapter for Denton House, but whether it will deliver the promised benefits or exacerbate existing issues remains to be seen.