

Application by Briffa Phillips Architects

- **Planning application: Conversion of Node Court to 8no. dwellings. Conversion of Midden building to residential use and construction of 6no. terraced dwelling-houses.**
- **Listed Building Consent Application: External and internal alterations to facilitate the restoration and conversion of Node Court to provide 8no. dwellings and to provide 1no. dwelling at the 'Midden.**

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Prepared by Briffa Phillips Architects: February 2025



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Planning application: Conversion of Node Court to 8no. dwellings. Conversion of Midden building to residential use and construction of 6no. terraced dwelling-houses.

Listed Building Consent Application: External and internal alterations to facilitate the restoration and conversion of Node Court to provide 8no. dwellings and to provide 1no. dwelling at the 'Midden.

- 1.2 This statement explains the thinking behind our planning application. It is prepared in compliance with the guidelines set out by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in 2006. The report (section 2) shows how we have thought about the design relative to factors identified by CABE, but also in relation to relevant development plan policy and Government guidance.
- 1.3 This evaluation is informed by an analysis of the physical, economic, social, historical and policy context of the site. We have also thought carefully about how everyone, including disabled people, older people and young children will be able to use this proposed development.
- 1.4 The current adopted North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted in November 2022. There remains a shortfall in the supply of new dwellings and land for new dwellings in the District. Many areas are under pressure to provide more homes which local residents, especially young people can afford to live in. For these reasons assessment of this application should also be made with regard to the Policies set out by National Planning Policy Guidance - The NPPF (December 2024).
- 1.5 The relevant planning policies are:

**National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024).
The pertinent paragraphs are:**

- 7 Achievement of sustainable development
- 8 Sustainable development – overarching objectives
- 10 A presumption in favour of development
- 11 Plan making and decision taking:
 - (d) out of date policies – granting permission
- 14 Presumption in favour of housing
- 39 Decision making – positive and creative
- 50 Premature applications
- 56 Planning obligations
- 57 Planning conditions
- 61 Boosting the supply of homes
- 73 Small sites – windfall housing
- 78 A five year supply

- 84 Avoid development of isolation homes in the countryside, unless:
 - b) To secure the future of heritage assets.
 - c) Re-use of redundant or disused buildings.
- 96 Healthy, inclusive and safe places
- 109 Promoting sustainable transport
- 112 Parking standards
- 116 Highways impact
- 124 Effective use of land
- 125 Land use:
 - (c) give substantial weight to housing using suitable brown field land
- 126 Proactive role bringing forward brownfield land
- 129 Achieving appropriate densities
- 131 Achieving high quality development
- 135 Planning Policies and Decisions should ensure:
 - b) Visually attractive, layout and landscaping.
 - c) Sympathetic to local character and history, while not discouraging innovation.
- 139 Great weight given to outstanding and innovative design – sustainability
- 142 Green Belt – urban sprawl
- 143 Green Belt – purposes:
 - (e) to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging re-use of land
- 153 Green Belt – inappropriate development, very special circumstances
- 154 Green Belt exceptions:
 - (e) limited infilling in villages
 - (g) harm in relation to openness
- 164 Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- 165 Increase use of renewable and low carbon technology
- 167 Community-led renewable initiatives
- 187 Enhancing the natural environment
- 192 Enhance biodiversity
- 202 The significance of the heritage asset
- 203 Significance and setting
- 207 A positive contribution
- 212 Assessment of potential harm
- 213 Justification of harm
- 214 Public benefit
- 215 Securing optimum viable use
- 216 Arriving at a balanced judgement
- 210 Positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 213 Great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation.
- 215 Harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
- 218 Record keeping
- 219 Opportunities for new development.

Annex 2 Glossary Definition of Previously developed land.

North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations

- Policy 2 Green Belt
- Policy14 Nature Conservation
- Policy55 Car Parking Standards
- Policy57 Residential Guidelines and Standards

Supplementary Planning documents

- Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD September 2011

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

This new local plan has now been adopted, following completion of the final public consultation exercises and having been agreed and approved by Full Council in April 2017. The policies of relevance in this instance are as follows: -

Strategic Policies

- SP1 – Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire
- SP5 – Countryside and Green Belt
- SP6 – Sustainable transport
- SP7 – Infrastructure requirements and developer contributions
- SP8 – Housing
- SP9 – Design and sustainability
- SP11 – Natural resources and sustainability
- SP12 – Green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape
- SP13 – Historic Environment

Development Management Policies:

- T1 – Assessment of transport matters
- T2 – Parking
- HS2 – Affordable housing
- HS3 – Housing mix
- D1 – Sustainable Design
- D3 – Protecting living conditions
- D4 – Air quality
- NE2 – Green infrastructure
- NE5 – New and improved public open space and biodiversity
- NE7 Reducing flood risk
- NE8 – Sustainable drainage systems
- NE9 –Water quality and environment
- HE1 – Designated heritage assets
- HE2 – Heritage at risk

1.6 Planning History

1.6.1 Ref: 18/03366/FP

Received: 16.1.19, Validated 11.2.19, Withdrawn

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PROJECT: NODE COURT, DRIVERS END LANE, CODICOTE,
HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE, SG4 8TR DATE: FEBRUARY 2025

Full Planning Permission: Conversion of Node Court to 9no. dwellings. Erection of 3no. dwelling-houses to facilitate the restoration of Node Court together with associated car parking, landscaping and boundary treatment. Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 8TR - Withdrawn

Ref: 18/03367/LBC

Received: 1.1.19, Validated 11.2.19 Withdrawn

Listed Building Consent: External and internal alterations to facilitate the restoration and conversion of Node Court to provide 9no. dwellings. Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 8TR - Withdrawn

Ref: 98/00209/1LB

Received: 13.2.98 Validated 13.2.98

Ground floor window, external lights, burglar alarms, gas meter boxes and fire alarm panel. Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR
Status: Decided

Ref: 97/01045/1LB

Received: 12.8.97 Validated 12.8.97

Installation of dormer windows as variation of part of consent ref: 97/0337/1LB granted 19.6.97

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR
Status: Decided.

Ref: 97/00337/1LB

Received: 26.3.97 validated 26.3.97

Reconstruction to fire damaged building incorporating alterations to height and pitch of roof, the insertion of dormer windows, removal of rear chimney stack and lowering of window sills (as amended plans and letter).

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR
Status: Decided

Ref: 97/00339/1LB

Received: 26.3.97 Validated 26.3.97

Reconstruction of fire damaged building incorporating alterations to height and pitch of roof, the insertion of dormer windows, removal of rear chimney stack and lowering of window sills (DUPLICATE APPLICATION)

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR
Status: Unknown

Ref: 95/01190/1LB

Received 20.9.95 Validated 30.10.95

Internal alterations including new external door and additional rooflight (as amended by drawings 1576/1,2,3,4,5, and 9 received 11.12.95)

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR
Status: Decided



Ref: 88/00044/1

Received 13.1.88 Validated 13.1.88

Installation of 6 dormer windows and formation of first floor office space.

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR

Status: Decided

Ref: 87/01901/1LB

Received 17.12.87 Validated 17.12.87

Application for Listed Building consent for installation of 6 dormer windows with formation first floor office space.

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR

Status Decided.

Ref: 85/00725/1

Received 3.5.85 Validated 3.5.85

Change of use of part of building from residential to offices with provision of 23 additional parking spaces and construction of passing-bay on adjoining public highway.

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR

Status: Decided

Ref: 84/00117/1

Received: 25.1.84 Validated 25.1.84

Change of use of two rooms from residential to offices.

Site address Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts SG4 8TR

Status: Decided

1.7 Pre Application Consultation

- 1.7.1** A pre-application submission was submitted to North Herts District Council Ref: 18/00383/PRE on 5th February 2018 with a written response on 15th May. A summary of improvements following that guidance is set out in Section 4.2 of this report.
- 1.7.2** A short presentation was made to the Codicote Parish Council on 4th January 2019.
- 1.7.3** Local Ward Members were appraised of the proposals by letter dated 14th December 2018.

1.8 Summary of the Key Considerations

1.8.1 Background.

Node Court, a significant thatched Listed Building, has suffered two arson attacks. The most recent was catastrophic. A known serial arsonist was jailed following successful Police prosecution.





The applicant (who has owned Node Court since 1986) lost his office premises and has since ceased trading. The applicant was the main tenant over the years – finding suitable tenants has always been a difficult challenge. The result of the fire was that all tenants have moved elsewhere so any investment to reinstate offices would require multiple lettings or otherwise finding a single tenant. Market testing has concluded that finding a single tenant is challenging given better modern and less compromised offices in nearby towns. The applicant is 74 years of age and has always viewed Node Court as a pension. Embarking on a costly speculative office renovation at this time of life is not an option in commercial terms. Having maintained and cared for the building and its landscape over the years, the applicant, a genuine victim of crime, views this application as a responsible way forward, seeking the Council's support in reaching a positive conclusion. This statement demonstrates how Node Court readily lends itself to a residential change of use and the worthwhile preservation of an important historic building. The statement demonstrates by reference to Planning Policy and with supporting information how numerous public benefits would outweigh harm in relation to the Green Belt and the heritage asset.

1.8.2 Key Considerations

- Whether the proposed development would comprise inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
- The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it;

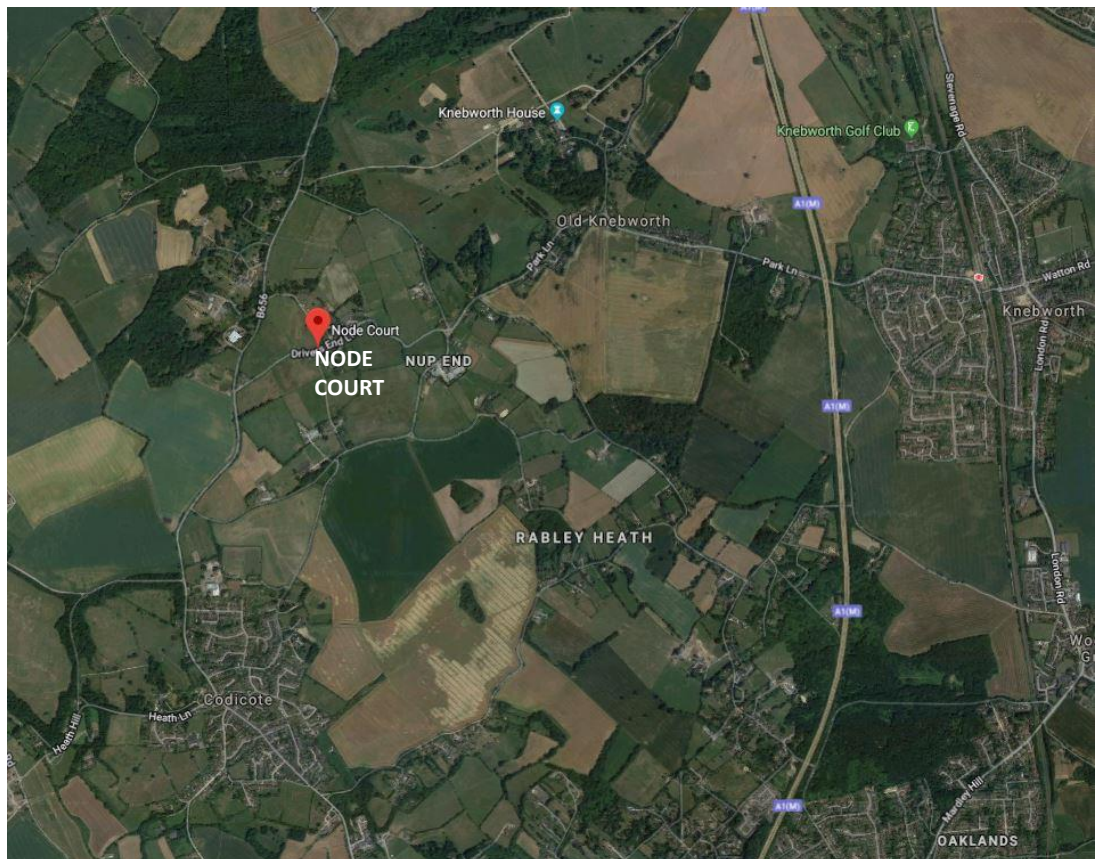
- Whether the benefits of a proposal would otherwise conflict with planning policies but which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset, outweigh the disbenefits of departing from those policies;
- Whether the proposal would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building and its setting.
- Whether the proposed development would be sustainable when assessed against the Framework;
- The effect of the proposed development on the living conditions of neighbouring properties.

1.9 The Surrounding Area

1.9.1 The application site lies 980m North of Codicote in North Hertfordshire, accessed via Drivers End with postcode reference SG4 8TR. The application site lies between the Node Conference Centre to the West and Nup End Business Centre to the West. The application site itself forms the South boundary of an established mixed-use development at Drivers End. To the South, open views extend towards Rabley Heath. Node Court comprises two structures: Node Court (former dairy, now derelict offices) and 'the Midden' currently B1 offices. The buildings are set within a mature treed landscape setting with large areas of surface parking, somewhat distracting from the 'Sylvan' nature of the development.

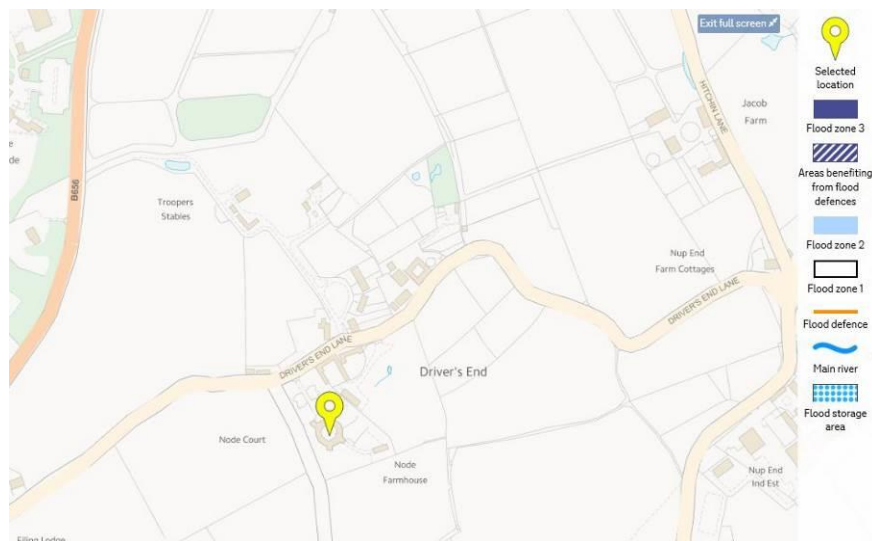
1.9.2 Image - Map location of the site

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1.9.3 Flood Plain

The site does not lie within a Flood Plain.



2.0 DESIGN

2.1. Evaluation

2.1.1 Node Court is located in the hamlet of Driver's End, c.1.4km north-east of Codicote and

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c.3.5km south-west of Stevenage in Hertfordshire. The A1(M) lies c.2.2km to the east towards Welwyn Garden City. Driver's End is focused to the north-east of the assessment building, with the site on the periphery of settlement. The site is bounded on three sides by open, agricultural land. The closest buildings front Driver's End Lane to the north and comprise Node Farmhouse and associated outbuildings.



Aerial View



View of the existing main entrance

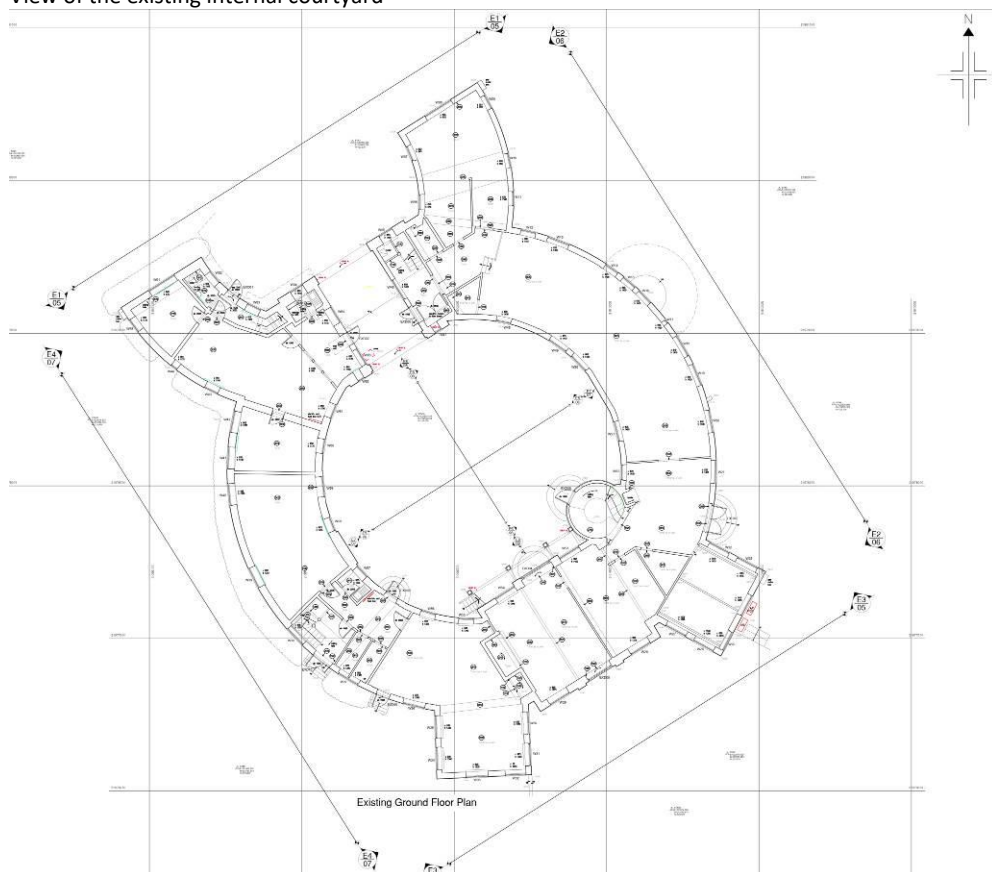


View of the existing internal courtyard

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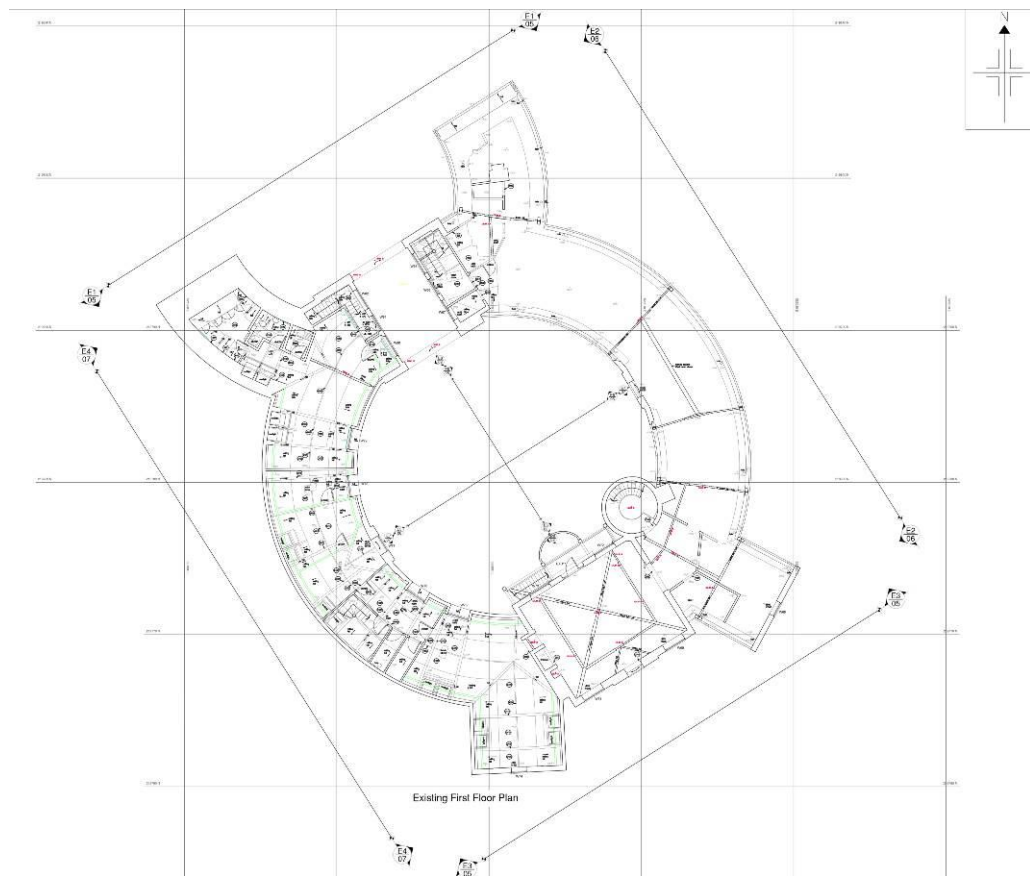


View of the existing internal courtyard

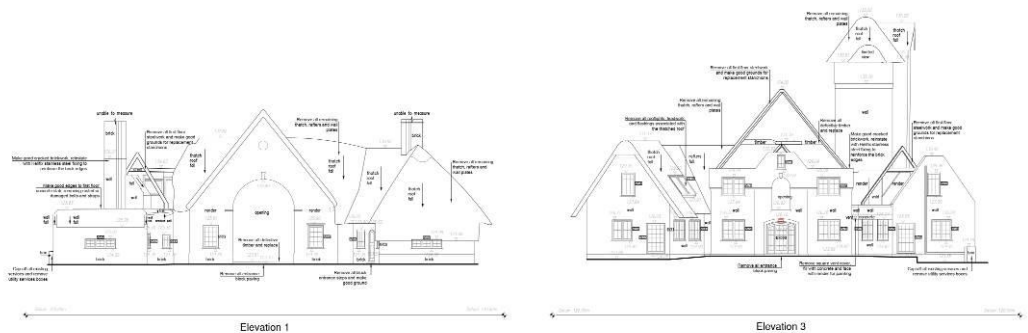


Existing Ground Floor Plan

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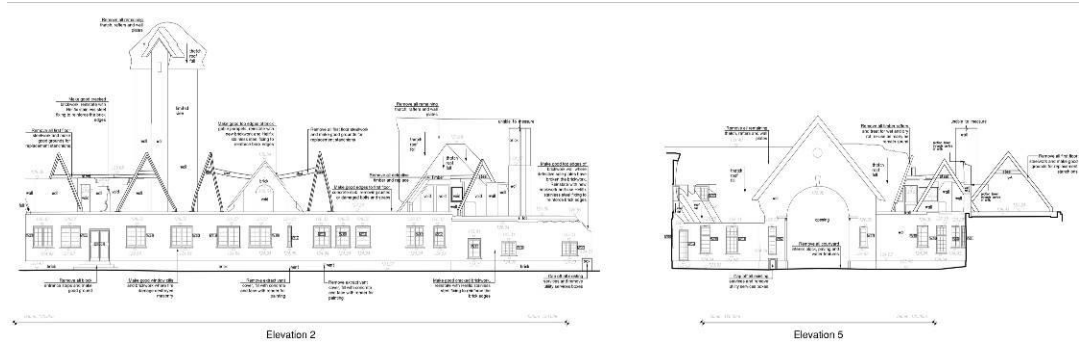


Existing First Floor Plan

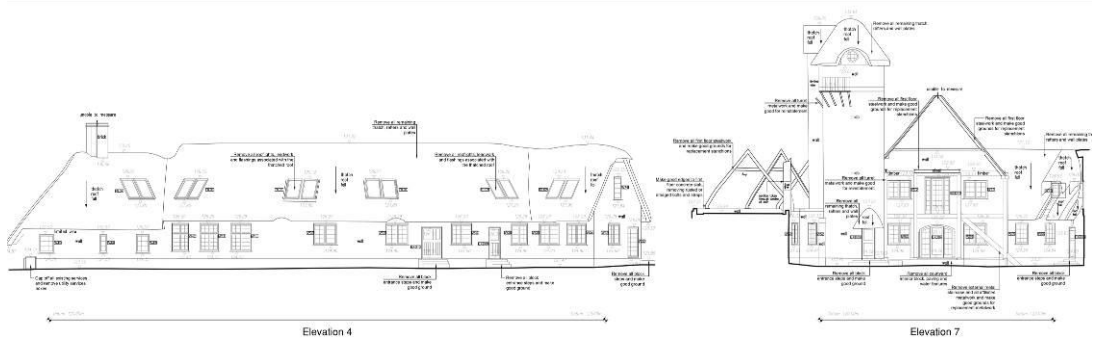


Existing Elevations 1 and 3

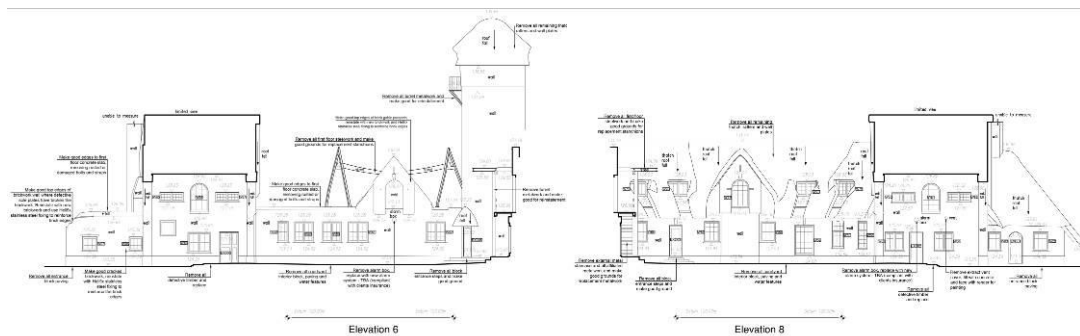
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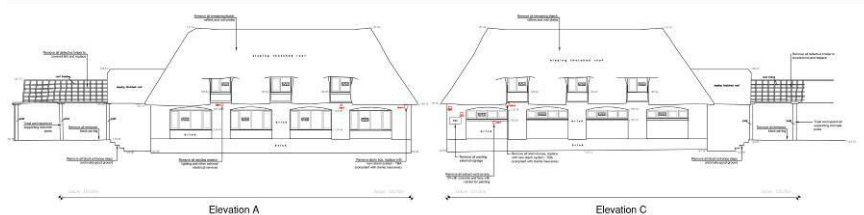
Existing Elevations 2 and 5



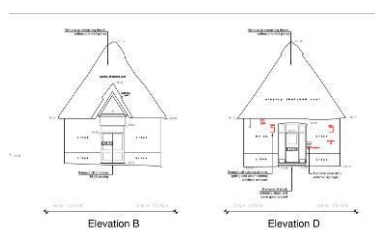
Existing Elevations 4 and 7



Existing Elevations 6 and 8



Existing long elevations – Midden



Existing side elevations – Midden

- 2.1.2** The Grade II Listed model dairy was begun in 1927 according to a dedication plaque, though the list description and associated literature implies it was completed the following year. It is circular on plan with four short projecting wings and distinguished by a tall circular tower which functioned as a silo. A second building lies a short distance away, known as the Midden, which formed a processing centre for the cattle manure and is connected to the main complex by a formerly thatched pergola or covered walkway which transferred the manure via an overhead rail. Otherwise, the site is laid out with mature trees and some landscaping, which to the east has been given over to car parking for offices at the Midden building. The building had already partly been converted to office use when the fire on the 12th July 2015 destroyed a large portion of the thatched roof on the south side and caused considerable damage. Subsequently, disuse and general exposure to the elements has begun to have a detrimental effect on the surviving portions.
- 2.1.3** The complex provoked much interest when first constructed as an example of ultra-modern dairying which paid close attention to hygiene in farming and the eradication of tuberculosis. It was designed by Maurice Chesterton (1882-1962), the cousin of author G.K. Chesterton, who has left a minor canon of work, mostly of housing schemes in the Samford District of Suffolk but who also collaborated with Elizabeth Scott on the creation of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon. As soon as the complex was constructed at what was then called Clover Top Farm, it attracted complimentary praise. Christopher Hussey writing in *Country Life* in June 1928 compared to a ‘fairy dairy’, likening to a ‘magician’s castle arisen in the homely Hertfordshire fields’ but also noting its lack of ornamentation and scientific application of good dairying principles in its layout and processes. Pevsner noted the design of the dairy as extremely odd and fantastical. Comparisons have been made in the list description to the dairy at the Hameau of Queen Marie Antionette at Versailles, though this is somewhat far-fetched. However a similar dairy was constructed by the Ovaltine Company at King’s Langley in the early 1930’s suggesting that it was influential in its time.
- 2.1.4** The Dairy is of painted brick with a thatched roof standing circular in footprint around an enclosed, central courtyard with four short projecting wings, as noted above. The second, nearby building, now known as the Midden, is rectangular and currently used as offices.
Note: See Wardell Armstrong’s Historic Building Appraisal and Impact Assessment for further detail.
- 2.1.5** It is clear that the building was always fairly restrained in its architecture, adhering loosely to loose Arts and Crafts principles with the thatching of the roof but extolled for its almost complete lack of decoration and the use of whitewash to project the clean, hygienic effect

which reflected advances in dairying in the early 20th century.

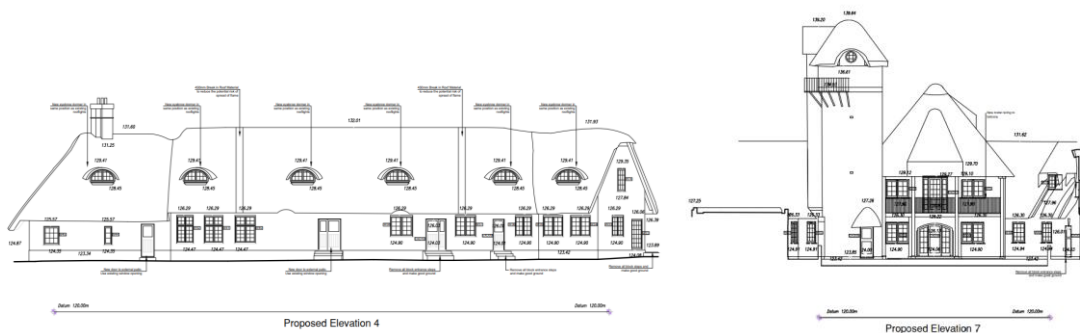
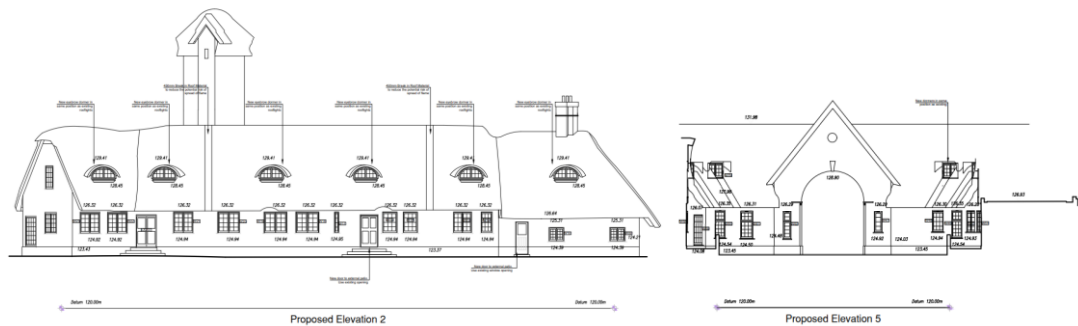
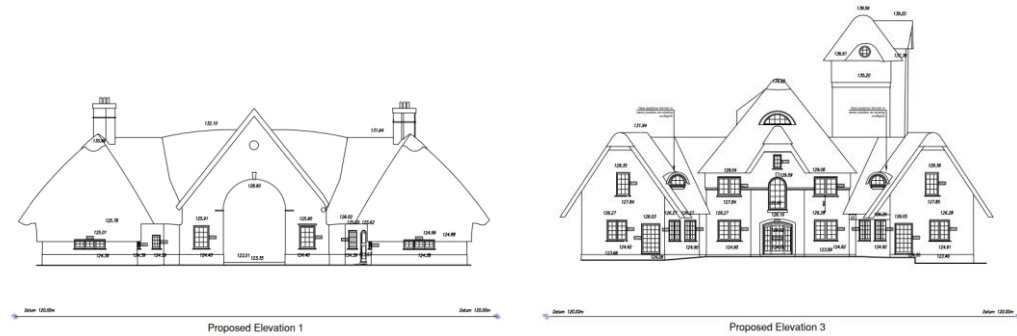
- 2.1.6** The earlier, interrupted process of conversion of the complex from agricultural to office use had already effectively sterilised the interiors, though the degree to which any machinery had survived from its heyday is now impossible to assess. The building had suffered a fire some 20 years ago according to newspaper reports but the details were not researched. However, much structural rebuilding, particularly of the roof, might be associated with this earlier episode.
- 2.1.7** The principal external alterations from the building as originally conceived include the replacement of all the earlier metal-framed windows with domestic timber casements painted white. Some windows and doors also appear to have been altered in configuration; either blocked or widened, though this might be part of a longer evolution. Within the thatched roof, many new windows have also been introduced, though this is a process which had begun by at least 1981 and adhered to the stylistic convention of the building in being of rustic, eye-brow profile. The velux windows on the external pitches appear to be entirely modern, associated with the replacement of the roof in the 1990's or thereabouts or with the more recent office conversion.
- 2.1.8** Internally the building has been effectively sterilised, its earlier use being barely legible, though a few ephemeral features such as the wall cladding and the original floor drainage etc. was set to disappear behind dry-walling and raised floors with the office conversion. Only the plan from Country Life gives an idea as to the former layout and flow of movement.
- 2.1.9** The building might benefit from further detailed study to assist with the reinstatement of lost features which might enhance its external appearance and allow congruous additions in keeping with the style. Furthermore, this is an area of vernacular architecture which has had little detailed study and which its conversion (subject to a successful application) offers an opportunity to record a building postulated to have set the standards for hygiene and efficient dairy farming in England.
- 2.1.10** Shortcomings of the existing situation.
Before the two arson events, the original building was much altered over the years, both in terms of construction and loss of historic fabric and in terms of machinery – fixtures and fittings. The last fire was catastrophic and rendered the main dairy building unusable without high investment. Marketing options were carried out seeking a potential buyer for the office use. With construction costs prohibitive relative to long term commercial yields, a residential change of use is proposed. This case is now put before the Council as a viable rescue plan for the preservation and enhancement of this important Listed Building.
- 2.2 Layout**
The layout comprises – the main circular building; the Midden; a terrace of six cottages. These three separate buildings are set amongst mature existing landscape and refurbished landscape areas. Large areas of existing surface parking are replaced by attractive soft landscape.

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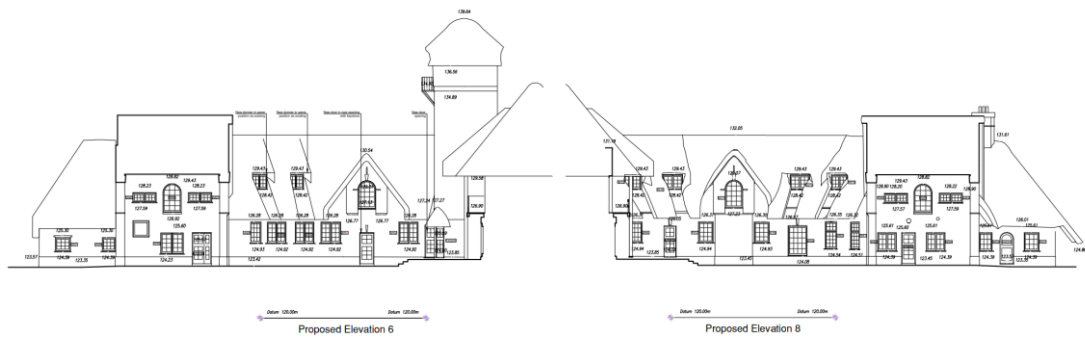


2.3 Scale

The scale of the main circular building is as existing. There are no new extensions or additions to the building. The scale of the Midden is as existing. There are no new extensions or additions to this building. The scale of the new cottages is one and a half storey with dropped eaves.



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Main Building - Proposed Elevations 6 and 8



Midden - Proposed long Elevations



Midden - Proposed side Elevations



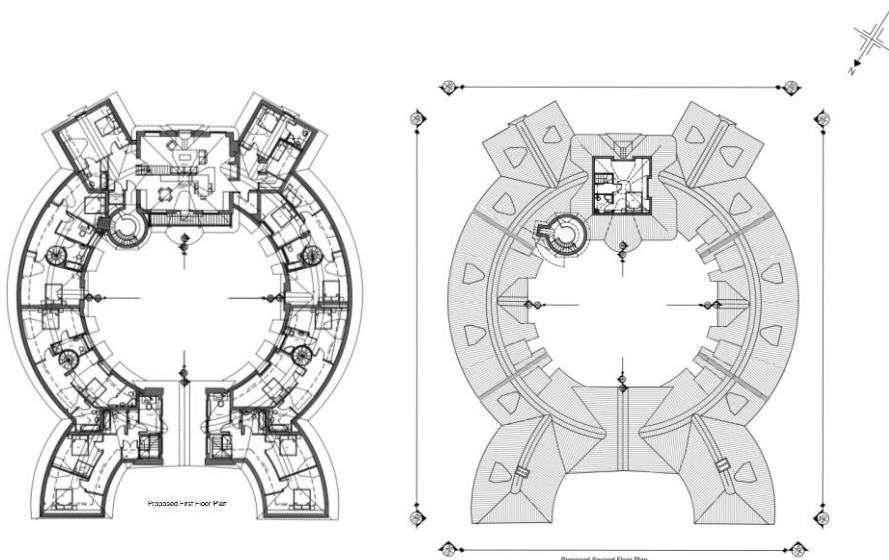
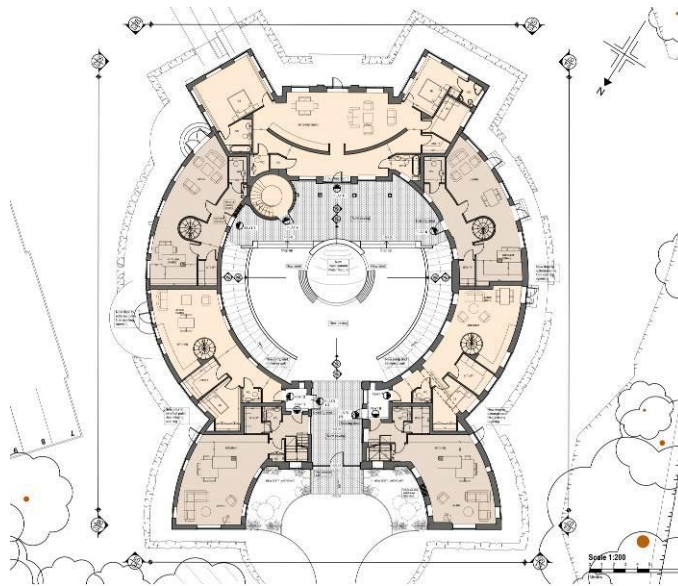
New cottages - Proposed Front and Rear Elevations



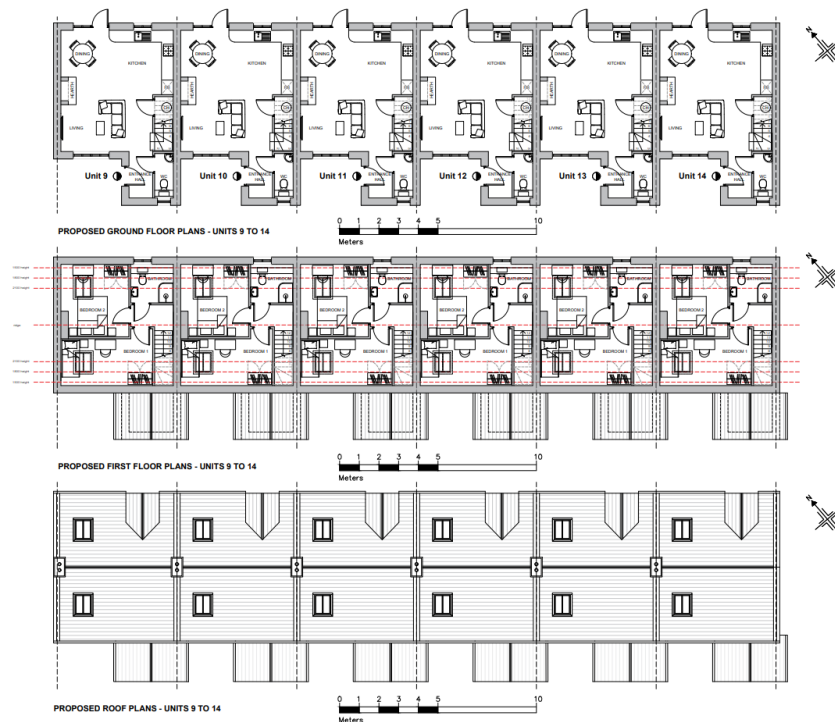
New cottages - Proposed Side Elevations

2.4 Design

- 2.4.1** The main building. The proposals plan for eight new dwellings in the main building. Six dwellings are laid out as cottages over two floors. Two new dwellings are laid out as apartments each on their own floor. The Midden is designed as one single dwelling. Six new cottages are designed as a row of diminutive secondary structures in place of open surface tarmac parking.



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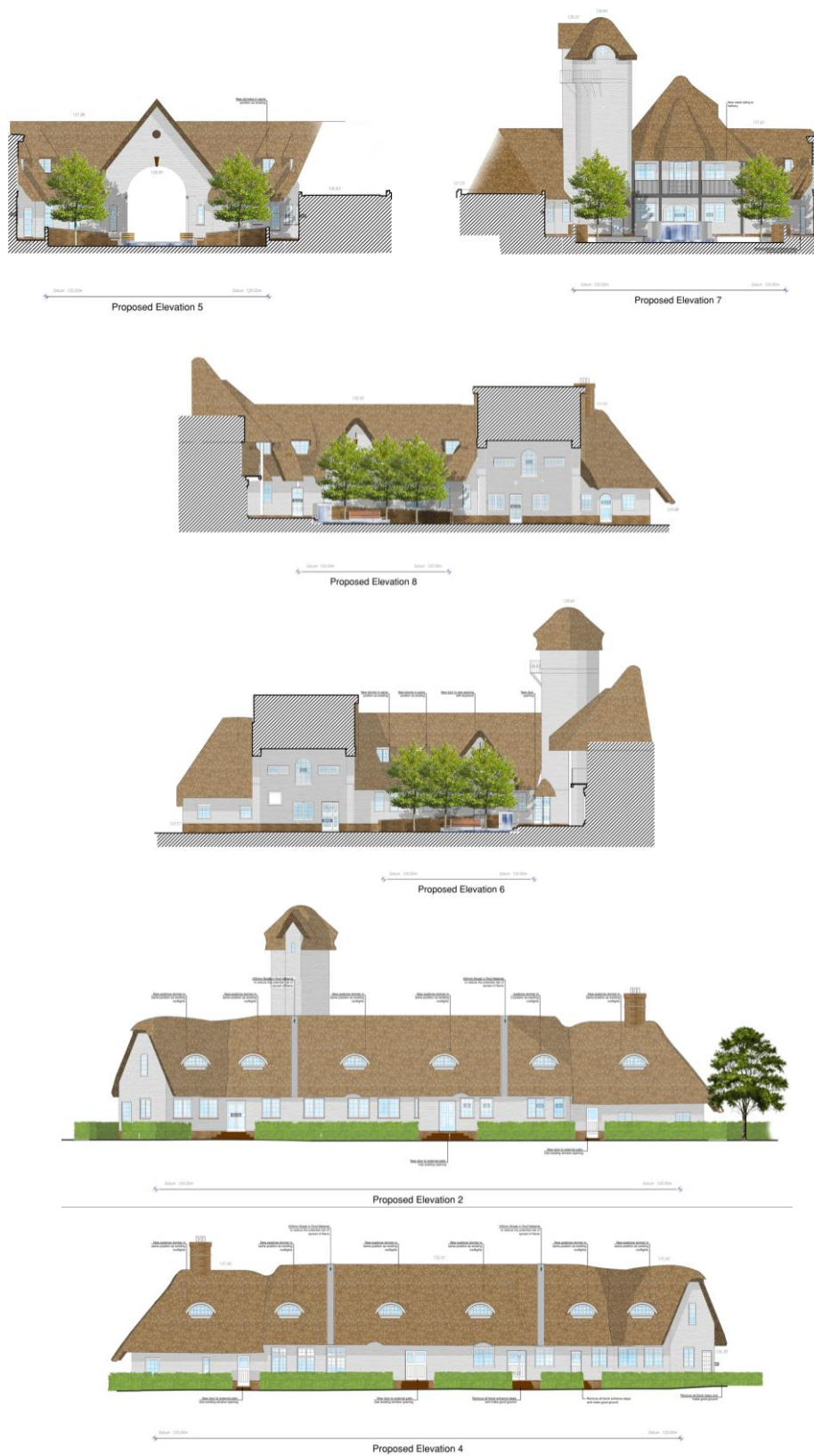
New cottages - Proposed Plans

2.4.2 Design Principles. The proposals are designed with minimal impact in relation to the original appearance and historic fabric of Node Court and The Midden and in relation to the new cottages, with minimal visual and material impact on the existing structures. (See Historic Building Appraisal and Impact Assessment – Appendix 1).

Images show the proposed elevations of the main building with materials:



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2.5 Impact on the Listed Building.

2.5.1 See Historic Building Appraisal and Impact Assessment by Wardell Armstrong for detail.

2.6 Impact on the Setting

2.6.1 Conclusion in relation to the Impact on the Building. The historical assessment concludes how 'considering the level of destruction . . . it is unlikely that any further work could damage the fabric further' and 'the building is now effectively an empty shell'. The report concludes that there would be no impact in relation to proposed internal partition arrangements, low impact in relation to minimal new apertures; low impact by retaining the only original door; low impact by creating a new door access; no physical impact in terms of the replacement roof and rooflights; low impact by incorporation of bat boxes; low impact by replacement roof timbers; no impact by converting the Midden; some impact by removal of small areas of brickwork.

2.6.2 Overall, both buildings lend themselves well to the principles of conversion from a perspective of the impact on historic fabric. Opportunities arise for the reinstatement of historic features which are visible on early photographs. For the Dairy, these include for example, the sinuous staircase which originally gave access to the inner balcony and the detailing of the original thatch, with its distinctive ridge.

2.6.3 Conclusion in relation to the impact of the proposals on the setting of the Listed Building. The proposals seek to retain the open quality of the setting. External facing gardens are designed without hard boundaries and domestic paraphernalia. Garden walls will be refurbished, garden features renewed, trees retained, lawns maintained, hedges replaced, and soft landscape introduced. Areas of tarmac parking are returned to lawn. Refuse and cycle stores have been implemented with a design that is both neutral and integrated with the style of Node Court. All the above would represent a positive enhancement of the immediate landscape. The walkway between Dairy and Midden will be refurbished thus maintaining the relationship of these two buildings and their historic setting. The internal courtyard of the Dairy will be restored. Six new dwellings comprise a row of terraced cottages, one and a half stories tall and reflecting the style of workers' cottages. Overall, these modest dwellings 'would not detract from the historical layout or appreciation of the site'. The Dairy remains the focal point of the environs as the dominant asset. Their height and massing is retained with existing levels; in particular the chimney stacks have been carefully positioned so as to not overtly extend the building height above this. Their style suggests a deferential and subordinate relationship that does not compete with the materials or style of the Dairy and allows it to retain predominance.

Following the comments of the Conservation Officer, amendments have been made to the design of the Dairy, the Midden and the terrace of 6 cottages to further retain the quality of the setting. These changes are as follows:

- Firstly, regarding the Dairy, the roof lights have been changed to eyebrow dormers - as shown in the amended plans and elevations - which aesthetically offers a more stylistically appropriate adaptation of the original design.

- Regarding the Midden, Building Conservation Commented: *'retaining the existing opening serving the hallway entrance to the far left of Elevation A, thereby, creating an asymmetrical elevation'*. In response: the Ground Floor Plan and Elevation A have been amended to retain the existing opening, thus creating an asymmetrical elevation, as shown in the amended drawings.
- Regarding the 6 Cottages:
Firstly, the Gross Internal Area of each dwelling has been increased to 75.7 meters squared to comply with the national space standards. Subsequently, the pitch of the roof has reduced to 30 degrees in order to minimise the height of the terrace.
 1. *Building Conservation Comment: 'the Heritage Consultant considers that the lack of chimney stacks may appear 'incongruous''.*
Action: A functioning fireplace and chimney stack added to each dwelling, as shown in the amended plans and elevations.
 2. *Building Conservation Comment: 'number of roof lights and ground floor windows could appear 'crowded''.*
Action: Roof lights reduced in quantity from 3 to 2; Ground floor windows reduced in quantity and updated to better respond to the proportions of the dwelling, as shown in the amended elevations.
 3. *Building Conservation Comment: 'I suggest that the entrances could be improved by extruding the porches'.*
Action: Plans and elevations updated to integrate a front porch at the entrance of each dwelling.
 4. *Building Conservation Comment: 'introducing solid 'plank' or 'flush-panel' door type or even a door type to match that shown at Plate 3 of the submitted HBIA'.*
Action: Front door design changed to a solid plank door type with a small window that corresponds with the proportions of the dwelling, as shown in the amended elevations.
 5. *Building Conservation Comment: 'omitting the side lights' (from door).*
Action: Side lights omitted and updated on drawings, as shown in the amended plans and elevations.
 6. *Building Conservation Comment: 'I am unwilling to support a truncated ridge detail with bargeboards that further serve to emphasise the truncated design.'*
Action: Barge board detail omitted from the design; gables are now complemented by a parapet wall, as shown in the amended elevations. In addition, gables no longer have a truncated ridge, rather a 30 degree pitch with a ridge.

7. *Building Conservation Comment: 'I find both the height of the through-eaves gable forms on the rear and the visually 'heavy' design of the glazing to also be detracting features'.*

Action: The through-eaves gable omitted and changed to a far smaller dormer window design, as shown in the amended plans and elevations. The glazing has been redesigned to be appear much lighter and more discrete in relation to the proportions of the dwellings.

Responding to the change has resulted in further amendments to the site plan, which include the following:

- Site plan updated to include the revised design for the 6 cottages.
- Road and landscaping features amended in response to the new cottage design, including planters at the front of each porch, and a 'passing place' to facilitate vehicular paths.

Following further comments of the Conservation Officer from their 05.02.25 Report, amendments have been made to the design of the terrace of 6 cottages and The Dairy. Regarding the cottages, these changes are as follows:

1. *Building Conservation Comment: 'I am of the view that modest through-eaves dormers perhaps even with 3-over-3 sashes and with increased articulation of the gables to these dormers can be encouraged.'*

Action: Dormers updated to a through-eaves dormer with 3-over-3 sashes and a steeper 40-degree roof pitch, as shown in amended elevations.

2. *Building Conservation Comment: 'The elevation drawing makes no reference to materials but with the main roof pitch set at 30 degrees this would not be conducive to handmade clay tile. I assume this would be natural slate or perhaps machine-made clay tile? The latter would need to be considered carefully. There is also no indication as to whether the walls would be facing buff or red brick or painted brickwork to echo that of the Dairy?'*

Action: The elevations of the cottages have been updated to specify the following materials: Natural Slate Roof, Multi Stock Brick and Painted Timber Doors and Windows, as shown in amended elevations.

Regarding The Dairy, these changes are as follows:

1. *Building Conservation Comment: 'If Node Court is effectively treated as a 'circular' terrace, this provides the means for spread of flame as has previously occurred at this building. To address this and as I have suggested previously, a break in roof material from thatch to perhaps tile at 6 and 12 o'clock would potentially reduce the potential risk of spread of flame.'*

Action: The Dairy design has been updated to include four 450mm breaks in the roof material of The Dairy from thatch to tile, positioned at regular intervals, to reduce the potential risk of spread of flame, as shown in the amended elevations and roof plan.

2.7 The Impact of the Proposals on the Amenity of Adjoining Owners

The proposals would have no impact on adjoining owners in terms of overlooking or loss of privacy to private amenity.

2.8 Impact of the Proposals on the Amenity of Future Occupiers

Occupiers of the main building would enjoy the benefit of beautiful communal landscaped gardens with mature trees and water features. Occupiers of the Midden and the new cottages would enjoy private garden amenity with some communal garden areas also. All dwellings would enjoy double aspect views and daylight.

2.9 Use

15 x Residential dwellings.

2.10 Amount (Gross internal areas)

Unit No.	Building Type	GIA (m ²)	GIA (Sq.ft)
1	Main Building	131	1410
2	Main Building	135	1453
3	Main Building	130	1399
4	Main Building	192	2066
5	Main Building	155	1668
6	Main Building	131	1410
7	Main Building	136	1463
8	Main Building	131	1410
9	New Cottage	75.7	815
10	New Cottage	75.7	815
11	New Cottage	75.7	815
12	New Cottage	75.7	815
13	New Cottage	75.7	815
14	New Cottage	75.7	815
15	Midden	182	1959

3.0 ACCESS AND ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Inclusive design

The design allows for a level threshold access and a Part M compliant ground floor WC.

3.2 Arboricultural Issues and Landscape Issues.

3.2.1 See Detailed information - Arboricultural Survey and Impact Assessment by David Clarke Chartered Landscape Architect.

3.2.2 The proposals retain the character of trees, hedges, lawns and garden features. Areas of parking and hardsurfacing are returned to lawn. Altogether with new soft landscape, the original open setting of the dominant structures is preserved. By so doing the proposals

represent a beautiful arboricultural and landscape design.

Note: See Appendix - DCCLA Arboricultural Impact Assessment
and Appendix – DCCLA Landscape Plan.

3.3 Landscape

3.3.1 See Appendix - Landscape Plan by DCCLA.

3.3.2 The Landscape Plan by DCCLA provides a beautiful open landscape proposal where existing trees are retained and preserved and where new planting, hedges and lawns are proposed. By doing so the proposals create a wonderful Sylvan rural setting which would naturally complement such a beautiful historic restoration.

3.4 Access and Transport

3.4.1 See Detailed information – Transport Statement by Integrated Transport Planning.

3.4.2 A Transport Assessment by Integrated Transport Planning Limited identifies the key issues relating to the Local Highway network. It also identifies sustainable transport in the local area including public transport Bus Route 314, locally maintained public rights of way and footpaths and the National Cycle Route 12 which passes within 900m of the application site. A wider analysis shows railway access via Knebworth to Cambridge and to Moorgate and Kings Cross and St. Pancras within 3.5 kilometres of the application site.

3.4.3 The Transport Statement concludes how 15 new dwellings would have negligible impact in Highways terms. It concludes how the site lies within proximity of sustainable transport options and access by larger vehicles and parking. These elements are considered in line with relevant policy and highways regulations.

3.5 Ecological Issues and Impact

3.5.1 See Detailed information - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

3.5.2 The proposals offer an extensive range of ecological initiatives for nature conservation in relation to habitats flora and fauna.

3.6 Ecological Enhancement Measures

3.6.1 See Detailed information - Ecological Enhancement Measures

3.6.2 Working in collaboration with specialist ecologists, the proposals include a variety of ecological enhancement measures.

3.7 Building Condition and Listed Building Works.

3.7.1 See Detailed information - Building Condition Survey and Listed Building Work Appraisal by Briffa Phillips Architects.

3.7.2 The proposals include detailed annotated drawings identifying 'spot items' of historic fabric for repair.

3.8 Sustainable Drainage

3.8.1 See Detailed information – SuDs Strategy Report by Innervision Design.

3.8.2 A conceptual SuDs Strategy Report by Dr. Robin Saunders of Innervision Design Limited provides an authoritative proposal for surface water disposal. Due to the retention of thatched roofs these proposals create very little surface run off and provide a highly sustainable recycling of rainwater on the site.

3.9 Affordable Housing

3.9.1 The proposals do not envisage on-site provision of affordable housing but the applicant does accept contributions by way of a S106 agreement.

3.10 The Dorset Model – FIRE SAFETY

3.10.1 The proposals will incorporate the building control requirements of The Dorset Model from Dorset's Councils Building Control Technical Committee. The Dorset Model is guidance for extensions and new buildings with thatched roofs that are within 12m of a boundary. The requirements are as follows:

- A. Rafters are to be overdrawn with a minimum 30 minute fire barrier (integrity and insulation) and this barrier should also be water resisting. 50 x 25 battens are recommended on a micro-porous boarding to allow the thatch to breathe. (Dorset Fire and Rescue Service recommend a 60 minute barrier under the thatch for property protection). The use of a flexible material or cavity foam as a fire resisting barrier is not considered acceptable for the purposes of the Dorset Model.
- B. The chimney, including the pot, should terminate at least 1.8m above the height of the ridge. Due to the risk of condensation forming as hot gases cool, the chimney pots should be limited to a maximum height of 600mm.
- C. A domestic mains and battery powered, interlinked smoke alarm system will be required with one smoke alarm fitted in the roof void. The system should generally be in accordance with that specified in Approved Document B to B.S. 5839 Pt. 6: 2004
- D. A terrace may not consist of more than three thatched dwellings together.
- E. The use of intumescent mastic is required to help seal the fire barrier along all its junctions.

- F. The written comments of the adjoining property owner may be requested by the local authority for consideration.

In response to item D of these requirements, 'A terrace may not consist of more than three thatches dwellings together.': The Dairy will include four 450mm breaks in the roof material from thatch to tile, positioned at regular intervals, to reduce the potential risk of spread of flame, as shown in the amended elevations and roof plan.

Further, the Dorset Model makes a series of recommendations to be carefully considered in the design process. These recommendations are as follows:

- A. The provision of a loft hatch is recommended for fire fighting purposes. The minimum recommended size is 600mm x 900mm.
- B. Advice should be sought from an approved electrical contractor regarding the most appropriate type of wiring system. Effects from rodent damage and straw debris need to be considered and the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting have issued guidance to their members.
- C. It is NOT recommended to install recessed lighting into the ceilings below the thatch. Light fittings within the roof space to be in a bulkhead fitting. External floodlights should not be located under the eaves of the thatch.
- D. Spark arrestors on the flues are NOT recommended because they can clog and restrict the flow of flue gases.
- E. It is recommended that an external water tap supplied from the rising main is fitted with a hose capable of reaching all parts of the roof.
- F. Any metal plumbing in roof space should use compression joints to avoid the use of blow torches.
- G. In order to achieve a 'U' value of 0.2w/m²K for thatched roofs, the following was taken from CIBSE Guide A3: Reed = thermal conductivity 0.09 and a resistivity of 11.1 Straw = thermal conductivity 0.07 and a resistivity of 14.3 This gives a 'U' value of 0.2/m²K for 450mm of reed and 350mm of straw. On this basis ceilings may require additional insulation.

4.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Whether the proposals would comprise inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

- 4.1.1** The site is within the Green Belt and the relevant planning policies are contained within the current adopted District Local Plan 2011 - 2033. In this context the National Planning Policy Framework December 2024 is also very relevant as there is a shortfall in housing provision.

- 4.1.2** The relevant paragraphs of the National Planning Policy Framework December 2024 are set out in Section 1.5 above and discussed below.
- 4.1.3** The main thrust of this application is to demonstrate the overall balance of public benefits versus harm of the proposed development to the Green Belt and the heritage asset.
- 4.1.4** The principle of development should be assessed relative to the guiding Green Belt Policies. Section 13 of the NPPF December 2024 offers supporting justification. Paragraph 143 seeks to 'encourage the recycling of derelict land'. Paragraph 153 sets out the requirement for very special circumstances – which this proposal provides by complying with Paragraph 154. Paragraph 154 sets out exceptions for inappropriate development. These include c) alterations of a building provided it does not provide disproportionate additions over and above the original size of the building; and g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land whether redundant or in continuing use and which would 'not have a greater impact' and which would 'not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
- 4.1.5** These proposals largely re-use existing buildings without any extension or enlarged footprint or floorspace. On this basis there would be no harm to openness in relation to the conversion of Node Court Dairy and Midden.
- 4.1.6** When it comes to the visual impact of the six terraced houses, these are positioned within the interior of the site and in the proximity of existing buildings to the North. On this basis visual impact would be negligible, unseen from public view. The historical buildings impact assessment (Appendix 1) concludes how these dwellings would be subordinate to Node Court and consequently would affirm Node Court as the primary building in the landscape. The proposals therefore would have at worst a neutral impact on the setting of the Listed building and landscape.
- Following the comments of the Conservation Officer, amendments have been made to the design of the terrace of 6 cottages to reduce their visual impact and to further emphasise the building as subordinate to Node Court. These changes are discussed above in Section 2.6.3.
- 4.1.7** Node Court Dairy and the Midden are substantial structures and their conversion would not be inappropriate in itself on this basis.
- 4.1.8** In relation to openness by potential subdivision of amenity land, these proposals very carefully place existing buildings in a refurbished landscape completely free of any new subdivision or domestic paraphernalia. Large areas of open surface parking are reduced in size and new lawns thus improve the openness of the setting of the Listed Building. New development is positioned to the North allowing clear and unobstructed views across and through the landscape. This 'open landscape' concept allows the focus to rest upon the refurbished link and thatched pergola, a key organising element for the historically correct complex and relationship of buildings.
- 4.1.9** The built form of these cottages is subordinate to the main Listed structures and

positioned so as to avoid impact on the openness of the existing landscape setting.

4.1.10 With regard the impact of the proposals on the character, setting and significance of the Listed Building (see Historic Building Appraisal and Impact Assessment Appendix 1). The report conclusively supports both the approach to the subdivision of the main building and the sensitive assimilation of the new buildings. When considered together with landscape preservation and enhancement of natural landscape features – altogether these proposals provide a robust high quality balance of benefits versus harm.

4.1.11 Policy justification offering additional support is found in Paragraph 202 of the NPPF December 2024 which recognises the value of conservation of ‘irreplaceable resources’. Paragraph 215 says that ‘where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm (as demonstrated above) to the significance of the heritage asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing its optimum, viable use.

Clearly these proposals are well considered, high quality conservation responses that would secure the viable use of these significant buildings and this important place for generations to come. Paragraph 219 of the NPPF says that Local Authorities should look for opportunities for new development ‘within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance’. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting ‘should be treated favourably’.

4.1.12 Market Testing. A statement of marketing is submitted separately. The marketing exercise found no investors willing to renovate Node Court as an office premises proposal. The renovation of Node Court is a daunting prospect in commercial office terms with much better, readily rentable premises in the Local Hertfordshire Area. For these reasons a change of use to residential development is a situation of last resort which by definition should allow exceptional planning policy justification.

4.1.13 Sustainability. The golden thread of the NPPF December 2024 is the presumption in favour of sustainable development. These proposals would contribute to the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, environmental and social. The proposals would contribute towards an economic role by creating a significant construction/employment project for a rural economy. It would create affordable small private sale housing in a location where employment opportunities are good and where new families might contribute to the local economic activity in a positive way. The proposals reduce the vehicular activity generated by office use, thus lessening the environmental impact upon air quality and highways infrastructure which in turn lessens harm to the Green Belt. Whilst the site lies slightly outside the village of Codicote, the Transport Statement clearly demonstrates a variety of sustainable transport options in the near vicinity and within 3.2km of the site. With current legislation deterring use of diesel vehicles and with future trends towards private electric vehicles and a de-carbonised nation grid, supplementary use of private vehicles would be both socially and environmentally sustainable. A condition of this application could require the provision of electrical charging points for all new dwellings. Socially, the impact of the proposals would be very positive. Notwithstanding the contribution to the historic and ecological environment, the proposals would provide opportunities for social

integration where new residents could support the local rural economy and enjoy local schools, post office, shops, pubs and leisure facilities.

TRANSPORT LINK

Cycling	National Cycle Network route 12 Dense network of surrounding rural lanes	Approx. 900 meters to the east of the site, providing a signed route to the centres of Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth Garden City, as well as integrating with the wider cycle network
Walking	Dense network of surrounding public rights of way	Routes can be followed between the site and Codicote. Approx. 2km from the site to the centre.
Bus	Bus route no.214 between Welwyn Garden City and Hitchin	Bus stop located approx. 450 metres from the site, at the junction of Drivers End Lane and the B656.
Rail	Thameslink and Great Northern rail services	Knebworth station is at 3.5km from the site by road

FACILITIES

Schools	- Codicote C of E Primary Schools - Knebworth pre-school - Knebworth Stepping Stone pre-school - Knebworth Primary and nursery school - Knebworth Montessori school	- Approx. 3km - Approx. 3.2km - Approx. 3.8km - Approx. 3.9km - Approx. 4km
Food Stores	- Small food stores and supermarket in Codicote - Small food stores and supermarket in Knebworth - Superstore	- Approx. 3km - Approx. 3-4km - Approx. 4.6km
Churches	- St Giles Church, Codicote - Churches in Knebworth - Churches in Welwyn G. City	- Approx. 2.2 km - Approx. 3-4km - Approx. 3.3km
Parks	- Knebworth Country Park - Singlers Marsh Nature Reserve, Codicote - Knebworth Recreation Ground, Stevenage - Shephalbury Park, Stevenage	- Approx. 3.5km - Approx. 4km - Approx. 4km - Approx. 6.9km
Libraries	- Knebworth Library - Welwyn Library - Stevenage Central Library	- Approx. 3.5km - Approx. 5.2km - Approx. 6.2km
Sports Centres	- John Clements Sports & Community Centre, Codicote	- Approx. 1.7km

	- Odyssey Health Club & Spa, Knebworth, Stevenage	- Approx. 3.8km
Swimming Pools	- Stevenage Swimming Centre	- Approx. 6.9km
Community Centres	- The Node, Codicote - John Clements Sports & Community Centre, Codicote	- Approx. 1.1km - Approx. 1.7km
Museums	- McGrath Italian, Hitchin - The Manor House, Welwyn - Welwyn Roman Baths - Stevenage Museum	- Approx. 6.2km - Approx. 7.1km - Approx. 5.5km - Approx. 7.2km
Post Office	- Codicote Post Office	- Approx. 2km
Pubs	- Lytton Arms, Knebworth - The Bell Motel, Codicote - The Goat Inn, Codicote - The Globe, Codicote	- Approx. 1.2km - Approx. 2km - Approx. 2km - Approx. 2km

5.0 CONCLUSION

This statement has demonstrated numerous public benefits which would outweigh harm caused to the Green Belt and the Heritage Asset. The benefits are; a) Node Court and its landscape would be preserved and enhanced to the highest historic buildings conservation standards; b) the proposals would not harm the visual appearance or setting of the Listed building; c) the proposal would secure any remaining historic fabric together with the coherent historic arrangement of buildings; d) the proposals would secure the long term maintenance of the landscape setting; e) the proposals would reduce the vehicular intensity of the site and the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt if the buildings were used to a maximum office capacity; f) the proposals are sustainable in relation to public transport, footpaths and cycle paths making these services and facilities will be more viable in use; g) the proposals would meet the objectives of the 'Golden thread' running through the National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024 – that of economic, social and environmental benefit. New dwellings would provide homes for working people and would provide employment for construction workers. New families would bring spending and investment opportunities to existing leisure and businesses in the Codicote Parish. h) the proposal would reduce the potential for future crime and lastly; i) the proposals offer enhanced ecological measures and a sustainable diverse flora and fauna.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated how a complex range of public benefits would outweigh harm to the Green Belt and the Historic asset. All of the key issues regarding parking and the negligible impact on the highways, a sustainable drainage strategy resulting in minimal runoff and recycling rainwater, a beautiful landscape design, and ecology enhancements, have been shown to be successfully incorporated within the proposals as detailed above. On this basis the planning application can now be approved.