

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	26/01097/FP & 26/01098/LBC
CASE OFFICER:	SL
APPLICATION SITE:	23A Market Place, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1DT
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Change of use from Restaurant Class E(b) to Office Class E(c) Internal alterations to facilitate the change of use from Restaurant Class E(b) to office Class E(c).

RECOMMENDATION:

I raise **NO OBJECTION** on the basis that the change of use from Restaurant Class E(b) to Office Class E(c) will not harm the character of the Hitchin Conservation Area, thereby satisfying the provisions of Sections 66(1) & 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and the aims of Policy HE1 of North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

Whilst the internal alterations to facilitate the change of use from Restaurant Class E(b) to office Class E(c) will not harm the special character of 23A Market Place thereby satisfying the provisions of Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and the aims of Policy HE1 of North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

Impact on the special character of 23A Market Place and the character or appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area.

The proposal will have no adverse impact.

SITE CONTEXT:

Nos.22 and 23 Market Place are grade II listed and located in the Hitchin Conservation Area. Both the building and the area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. The list entry is provided at the following link:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1173518?section=official-list-entry>

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

As stated in the submitted Heritage Statement/ DAS/ AHIA (April 2026), the works are described as *'Change of use from Restaurant Class E(b) to office Class E(c), Internal partitions, linings repairs, services, decoration, and minor alterations to facilitate this further to application reference 26/00859/LBC'*. The HS/DAS/AHIA goes on to say:

Both properties are designated listed buildings located within the historic core of Hitchin, contributing positively to the character and appearance of the Market Place and the wider conservation area. The proposals facilitate occupation by a single tenant, supporting viable use and enabling a programme of repair and enhancement (subject to separate Listed Building Consent).

At 2.1 of the HS/DAS/AHIA it describes the proposed works as:

- *Change of use from restaurant to office.*
- *Formation of New stud partitions to reinstate walls removed by previous restaurant fit out.*
- *New plasterboard wall linings set on battens to reinstate existing damaged plasterboard wall linings.*
- *New ceiling linings to replace asbestos (already removed).*
- *New timber infills set between existing timber studs.*
- *New internal services, wiring and removable radiators generally.*
- *Two reversible timber steps to accommodate a level change in No. 23.*
- *Internal decoration generally.*
- *New sliding door to the stud partition area.*
- *Existing plasterboard linings removed from existing timber beams to be exposed and repaired.*
- *Carpet laying over existing flooring.*

I have considered the 'Summary of Key Significances related to the Proposals' at 3.0 of the HS/DAS/AHIA and the following at 5.1 and 5.2.

5.1 Impact on Plan Form

- *The new partitions have a negligible impact upon plan form and in fact reinstate fragments of wall lost as part of the previous restaurant fit-out at first floor level. Impact is low and arguably a heritage gain in terms of re-instatement.*
- *The infill of plaster panels to the existing areas of exposed studwork are seen as an honest and evidential approach to creating the necessary fire and acoustic separation where existing timber studs are exposed. These timber studs would have had plaster and lath coverings or potentially brick infills historically, retaining their presence but recessing reversible walls between ensures that these remain legible features.*

Summary: Low/Neutral Impact

5.2 Impact on Historic Fabric

- *Limited to infill panels set between timbers. mechanical fixings to be carefully installed to existing fixing(sic) holes where possible with shallow wood screws to ensure these can be removed without damage.*
- *There is no loss of high-significance elements*
- *Existing timber framed elements to be coated in a matt clear fire-retardant coating. This is to enable the building to meet modern fire standards for structural integrity. The existing timbers have been varnished, and existing layers will need to be abraded prior to application.*
- *New electrical services will be run between timber battens and no new penetrations are proposed to historic linings or plaster and lath ceilings or walls.*
- *New wall linings will replace existing damaged plastered linings and will be set off existing historic fabric using timber battens to create service zones.*
- *Existing timber beams to the rear existing first floor kitchen area will be exposed creating a heritage gain.*
- *A new sliding door will be incorporated to the existing stud partitions to the front office area. This is a modern intervention that deliberately avoids creating a new conventional door where one did not exist previously and retains the legibility and openness of this element.*

Summary: Low/Moderate Impact.

I concur with the Heritage Benefits set out in the HS/DAS/AHIA and agree that the proposed internal alterations target moderate/low-sensitivity fabric, preserves high-significance elements and will support a sustainable, sympathetic use.

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

Sections 16(2), 66(1) & 72(1)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

Policy HE1

NPPF (December 2024):

The following paragraphs are relevant:

- **135 c)** (*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment*),
- **207** (*local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting*)
- **210** (*desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*),
- **212** (*great weight should be given to the asset's conservation*),
- **213** (*clear and convincing justification*), and
- **215** (*harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use*).

CONCLUSION:

I am satisfied that the proposed works would not occasion harm, therefore, I find this proposal **UNOBJECTIONABLE** and other than the standard 3yr condition no other conditions are offered.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 08/07/2026