

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	26/01069/FP
CASE OFFICER:	Saffron Loasby
APPLICATION SITE:	Radcliffe House Tilehouse Street Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 2DW
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	External alterations to replace windows and doors, roof alterations with installation of rooflights, inset balconies and dormer windows, extend existing entrance ramp, hard and soft landscaping alterations to include a central courtyard to replace existing parking/ hardstanding, and installation of refuse storage and cycle stores and external lighting.

RECOMMENDATION:

There is **NO OBJECTION**. The scheme will satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC) and /or 66(1) (FP/FPH) and/or 72(1) (both) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

SUGGESTED CONDITIONS:

Although there is reference to materials in the Design and Access statement, I would prefer to see a more robust approach to materials given its location and the scale of the external alterations. I have therefore I have suggested the condition below.

Details of materials to be used for the external works, hereby granted consent, shall be submitted to and agreed, in writing, by the Local Planning Authority before any works are commenced.

Reason: To safeguard the character and appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area to which this consent relates and to comply with Policies SP13 and HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 to 2031.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on listed building's special character – N/A

Impact on neighbouring listed buildings and their setting.



The location of Radcliffe House and its relationship to the Priory as illustrated in the above photo.

The extracts below are taken from the submitted Heritage Statement assessing the impact of the proposal on the Priory.

The Priory's setting is defined by its historic designed landscape, the River Hiz corridor, and its close relationship with the associated listed outbuildings that form a coherent estate group. Radcliffe House and Pease House lie outside the historic core and do not form part of the setting of The Priory or its associated listed buildings. There is no intervisibility between these buildings and the listed buildings, and neither forms part of any designed or principal heritage view. As such, Radcliffe House and Pease House cannot impact the significance of these heritage assets.

A substantial belt of mature vegetation and woodland lies between Radcliffe House and The Priory, providing effective visual separation. There is no intervisibility between the two sites and the listed buildings, meaning their setting is not impacted by Radcliffe House. The proposed works remain entirely within the existing built envelope and do not introduce additional height, bulk or visual prominence. The relationship between Radcliffe House and the listed buildings is illustrated in Figures 7-9 below.

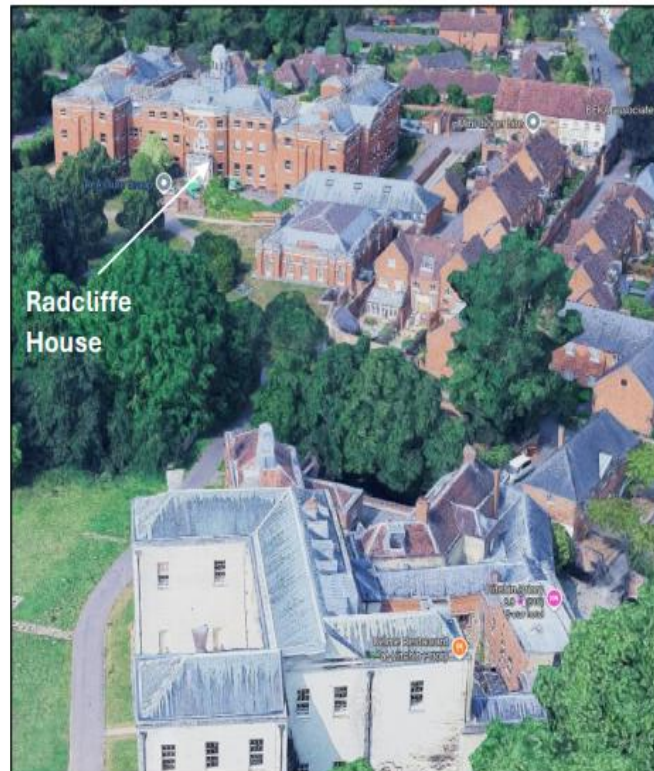


Figure 7: 3D illustrative views of the spatial relationship of The Priory and its associated Listed Buildings and Radcliffe House (Source: Google Earth, 2026)



Figure 8: 3D illustrative views of the spatial relationship of The Priory and its associated Listed Buildings and Radcliffe House (Source: Google Earth, 2026)

I would concur with this assessment and therefore raise no objections.

Impact on character and appearance of the conservation area –

The table below has been extracted from the Heritage Statement assessing impact on this part of the Hitchin Conservation Area.

Conservation Area

An assessment of the contribution of Radcliffe House to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, based on the criteria set out in the Historic England guidance Table 12, is provided below in **Table 5.1**.

TABLE 5.1: ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTION OF RADCLIFFE HOUSE TO THE HITCHIN CONSERVATION AREA	
Criteria	Analysis
Is the work of a particular architect or designer of regional or local note?	No.
Does it have landmark quality?	Radcliffe House is a three-storey red-brick office building dating from the 1987. Its contemporary design sits comfortably within the surrounding parkland and responds appropriately to its location near The Priory Hotel.
Does it reflect a substantial number of other elements in the conservation area in age, style, materials, form or other characteristics?	The building is late 20th Century and modern in character. It sits comfortably alongside the nearby historic parkland environment.
Does it relate to adjacent designated heritage assets in age, materials or in any other historically significant way?	Radcliffe House does not form part of the setting of adjacent designated heritage assets. The architectural language of the proposed alterations is sympathetic to the style and appearance of the building.
Does it contribute positively to the setting of adjacent heritage assets?	The proposed works, including the introduction of soft landscaping and the sensitive refinement of external openings, will improve the immediate setting of Radcliffe House. Radcliffe House does not form part of the setting of adjacent heritage assets and there is no intervisibility between them



Does it contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces including exteriors or open spaces within a complex of public buildings?	Yes. It is a well-designed modern office building of good architectural quality, and its approval took account of the surrounding open spaces and the sensitive setting of the Priory Hotel.
Is it associated with a designated landscape e.g. a significant wall, terracing or garden building?	No. The site does not adjoin or form part of the designated historic landscape of Priory Park. The proposed works relate to the immediate setting of Radcliffe House only.
Does it individually, or as part of a group, illustrate the development of the settlement in which it stands?	It reflects the modern-day growth and progression of the Priory grounds to accommodate the economic growth and needs of the town centre.
Does it have significantly historic association with features such as the historic road layout, burgage plots, a town park or a landscape feature?	No, however, it reflects the reduction of the Priory parkland context that has occurred over the centuries.
Does it have historic associations with local people or past events?	Radcliffe House takes its name from the Radcliffe family, former owners of the Priory, who rebuilt the main house in 1775 and retained elements of the original 15th-century cloisters.
Does it reflect the traditional functional character of former uses in the area?	The introduction of additional soft landscaping and the sympathetic refinement of external openings improve the immediate setting of Radcliffe House.
Does its use contribute to the character or appearance of the area?	Yes. Its continued use as an office building contributes to the established campus-style character of this part of the site. The proposed works will contribute positively to the immediate setting of Radcliffe House by refining its appearance and introducing softer landscaping.

Overall, the proposals preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. As Radcliffe House and Pease House do not form part of the setting of the nearby listed buildings and there is no intervisibility between them, the proposals will not harm the significance or setting of those listed buildings.

This is a thorough analysis, and I would concur that the proposal would not cause harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. In fact, some of the proposed landscaping is considered to be a positive contribution.

Site Context



Figure 6: Extract from Map 10: Character Area 7- Priory Park and Hitchin Hill (Source: Hitchin Conservation Area Character Area Appraisal)

The map above illustrates the site context.

There are some important recorded views (Map 10) which mention view (across the lake formed by the River Hiz and View 10 looking towards the town centre and the spire of St Mary's Church. The proposed work will not harm these views as they relate to the building's fabric and not to the general form, height or footprint.

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Radcliffe House is a modern office block (circa 1980s) and makes a neutral contribution the character and appearance of the conservation area.

"The new dormers are deliberately modest in scale, with clean detailing that complements the building's late 20th century character. The design approach has been guided by the architectural language of the existing building, with the new openings adopting a traditional form and proportion". (Planit Heritage Statement)

The proposed flat roof dormers are considered to be proportionate in scale and reflect existing character.

Window Bars to Existing Windows Decorative window bars are proposed to be fitted to the existing windows of Radcliffe House (Fig. 14). This element follows the same measured and context-led design approach adopted elsewhere across the estate. The bars are informed by a recognised and recurring feature within the local built environment, ensuring the intervention is wholly appropriate to its setting (Fig. 15). The bars will be integrated directly onto the existing windows to create a clean, well-resolved and visually robust detail. In addition to enhancing the architectural character and articulation of the elevations, they provide a clear functional benefit by improving security. This enhancement supports both the current office use and the future residential occupation of Radcliffe House, reinforcing the building's adaptability and long-term resilience.

There are objections to the above works as they would reflect the character of the estate.

The discreet introduction of balustrades and the addition of decorative window bars deliver a considered balance of safety and architectural refinement. By carefully positioning balustrades behind existing parapets and referencing local metalwork, the proposals maintain a calm and uncluttered roofscape while ensuring safe use of roof-level amenity space. The window bars further strengthen the building's visual character, drawing on local precedent to enhance façade quality. Together, these measures contribute to a cohesive, contextually responsive upgrade that enhances usability and appearance without harm to the character of the building or the wider estate.

There are no objections to the above as this will not detract from the character of the conservation area and will offer a cohesive architectural language to the estate.

Ground Floor Terraces and Associated Door Alterations

Ground Floor Terraces and Associated Door Alterations New ground-floor terraces are proposed to serve Radcliffe House, introducing high-quality external amenity space that strengthens the relationship between the building and its landscaped setting. The form and configuration of the terraces vary in response to their position around the building, ensuring a site-specific and sensitive approach.

Access from the internal accommodation to all new terraces will be achieved by lowering the cill heights of selected existing windows to form new full-height door openings. This approach retains the established rhythm and proportions of the elevations while introducing a functional and visually sympathetic threshold between inside and outside.

There are no objections to this will detailed above retain the rhythm and proportions of the elevations.

Ancillary Buildings

The link between the ancillary buildings is not considered to be a positive intervention and its removal is welcomed. There is no objection.

Alterations to window and door openings

Although the windows are large in scale (Ancillary Building A) there is no objection as they will reflect the new use of this building. Details of this will be required (see conditions).

New terraces

No objection subject to a detailed landscape strategy that will reflect a cohesive and improved overall setting.

Additional roof windows

No objection as this reflects existing rooflights.

The proposed alterations are predominantly to fabric of the main building and Ancillary Building A and B to facilitate the conversion of the block to a residential use (already granted) and these are considered not to cause harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area as already discussed above.

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

NPPF (December 2024):

The Local Plan and NPPF

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 and the policies contained within it i.e., Policy HE1. The plan was adopted November 2022.

The relevant paragraph numbers at Section 16 of the July 2021 version of the NPPF have been changed as follows:

197. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

199. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

200. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.....

202. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

206. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.

The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition) – December 2017

At para 14 under the sub-heading ‘Landscape Assessment and Amenity’ it states that “Analysis of setting is different from landscape assessment. While landscapes include everything within them, the entirety of very extensive settings may not contribute equally to the significance of a heritage asset, if at all. **Careful analysis is therefore required to assess whether one heritage asset at a considerable distance from another, though intervisible with it – a church spire, for instance – is a major component of the setting, rather than just an incidental element within the wider landscape.**”

At para 17 it states (my emphasis in bold): “All heritage assets have significance, some of which have particular significance and are designated. The contribution made by their setting to their significance also varies. **Although many settings may be enhanced by development, not all settings have the same capacity to accommodate change without harm to the significance of the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate it.** This capacity may vary between designated assets of the same grade or of the same type or according to the nature of the change. It can also depend on the location of the asset: an elevated or overlooked location; a riverbank, coastal or island location; or a location within an extensive tract of flat land may increase the sensitivity of the setting (i.e. the capacity of the setting to accommodate change without harm to the heritage asset’s significance) or of views of the asset. This requires the implications of development affecting the setting of heritage assets to be considered on a case-by-case basis.”

Relevant National Guidance i.e. Historic England:

Other relevant documents (Please specify):

CONCLUSION:

[Please see summary section above.](#)

OFFICER: Tricia Craggs

DATE: 8 July 2026