

Submitted via Planning Portal

Planning
North Hertfordshire District Council

15 August 2024

Our Ref: 7662HER

Dear Sir / Madam,

Applications for Full Planning Permission, Advertisement Consent and Listed Building Consent at 16 Bancroft, Hitchin, SG5 1JQ

This letter serves as a proportionate Planning, Heritage, Design and Access Statement, as required by Paragraph 200 of the NPPF, and has been prepared on behalf of our client Gail's Ltd in respect of applications for Planning Permission, Advertisement Consent and Listed Building Consent. Gail's seek permission for internal and external alterations to facilitate their occupation at the above address, and their opening of a new bakery in Hitchin Town Centre.

The Statement has been prepared under the guidance of Niall Hanrahan of Heritage Potential. Niall has a MSc in Historic Conservation and is also MRTPI accredited. This joint heritage and planning specialism allows him to effectively balance the public benefits of proposals against any identified harm to heritage assets.

In summary, the proposals seek for minor internal works to the ground floor, shopfront alterations and installation of new advertisements, to facilitate occupation by Gail's. The proposals seek to work with the character of the building, with an overall minor degree of alteration required given the site's longstanding association with commercial uses.

Application Site Context

The application site itself consists of ground floor commercial floorspace situated within the three-storey building located at 16 Bancroft, Hitchin, constructed c. early 19th century. The front elevation facing Bancroft comprises a grey brick façade with sash windows at first and second floor level. The shopfront is a modern installation, however contains traditional features including a timber fascia board, pilasters, capitals and consoles, whilst also host to a contemporary glazing arrangement befitting of its primary retail location.

The building was Grade II Listed on 13 April 1951 (list entry – 1102215). The site is also located within Hitchin Conservation Area, and within the setting of other Designated Heritage Assets, including 17 Bancroft immediately to the east (Craft Cleaver – Grade II Listed), and 12-14 Bancroft to the west (Grade II Listed).

Managing Director
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Dan Templeton | Elliot Jones | Katie Turvey

Consultant
Lorna Byrne

Associate Directors
Heather Vickers | Sam Deegan | Niall Hanrahan | Rob Scadding | Paul Galgey

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Sam Elliott | Katia Clarke | Will Rogers



The building has a longstanding history of being occupied by commercial operators, and was split into 3 separate commercial units c. 1980s, which remains to this day the current internal layout. The most recent occupier of no. 16 was Monsoon (Use Class E). Despite longstanding history being within commercial use, the unit has been vacant since 2020.

Located on Primary Shopping Frontage within Hitchin Town Centre, the surrounding area is characterised by buildings comprising commercial uses at ground floor, with a mix of commercial and residential uses above. The façade treatments vary from traditional to modern brickwork, with other buildings host to mock Tudor and render finishes. Shopfront designs at ground floor vary; whilst some maintain traditional features including stallrisers, pilasters and cornices, many are host to more contemporary shopfront designs.

Planning History

The site has been subject to numerous full planning, advertisement and listed building applications relating to both the exterior and interior, supporting the sites various commercial operations. Key relevant applications are summarised below:

- **83/00015/1** – Extension to existing shop to convert into 3 retail units, vehicular access to service area and 20 parking spaces. Approved 31.01.83.

- **83/00016/1LB** – Alterations and extension involving partial demolition of existing shop to convert into 3 retail units and demolition of dwelling house. Approved 19.05.83.
- **83/01425/1** – Alterations and extensions to existing retail store to provide 4 units (shops), car park and service area and access from Grammer School. Approved 20.10.83.
- **83/01427/1** – Demolition of part of existing building at rear and of outbuildings, erection of replacement single storey extension and refurbishment of existing shop to enable its conversion into four retail units. Approved 24.11.83.
- **84/00264/1LB** – Erection of external staircase and replace part of main roof with asbestos cement slate tiles. Approved 17.05.84.
- **85/00508/1LB** – Unit 3, 15/17 -Installation of new shop front. Approved 24.05.85.
- **92/01125/1A** – Continued display of fascia sign indirectly illuminated by 4 spotlights. Approved 30.11.92.
- **93/00524/1LB** – Internal alterations. Approved 02.06.93.
- **11/00274/1LB** – Alterations to existing shopfront including painting of timber and surround and fixings to allow erection of projecting sign. Internal alterations to ground and first floor layouts including reconfiguration of internal stud partitions to form new fitting rooms, staff and stock areas. Approved 04.04.11.
- **11/00281/1AD** – Replacement internally illuminated fascia sign; erection of externally illuminated projecting sign. Approved 04.04.11.
- **17/01839/1AD** – Installation of one internally illuminated fascia sign and one externally illuminated hanging sign. Approved 08.09.17.
- **17/01905/1LB** – Installation of one internally illuminated fascia and one externally illuminated hanging sign to front elevation of store. Approved 08.09.17.

Heritage Assessment

Two Designated Heritage Assets have been identified for the purposes of this proportionate assessment; 15 and 16 Bancroft (Grade II Listed), and the Hitchin Conservation Area.

15 and 16 Bancroft were listed as Grade II on 13 April 1951 (list entry – 1102215). The extract below from Historic England refers to the building as follows:

1. 5255 BANCROFT (West Side) Nos 15 & 16 TL18e9 SW 1/92 13.4.51.

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2. Early C19, three storeys, grey brick, 6 wide sashes, boxed eaves with console pairs of brackets, modern shops. Band at second floor level.

Nos 12 To 17 (consec) form a group.

Listing NGR: TL1846429315

The primary significance of the building derives from the front elevational features at upper floor level, including the prominence of sash windows and the roof features. The ground floor shops are defined as modern installations, with the current commercial

unit layout being created in the 1980s following planning permission being granted for their conversion into 4 individual units. The existing interior fit out of the ground floor is entirely modern, and at present is completely stripped out and empty following departure of the previous operator. It has been subject to numerous layers of modern commercial use, with no historic fabric nor remnants of previous historic commercial uses. Modern installations have included plant, vents, louvres, AC cassettes, internal partitions and commercial facilities and utilities.

Although no. 16 shopfront is a modern installation (granted permission under ref. 85/00508/1LB), it contains some traditional shopfront proportions and features, including a timber fascia board, pilasters, capitals and consoles. Modern shopfront are also present and combined with the more traditional features, including elongated shopfront glazing and a thin stallriser. Although a mix of traditional and modern shopfront features, the shopfront can be seen to positively contribute to the buildings appearance and respect the elevational qualities of the upper floor façade.

The northern end (rear) of the site comprises a rear storage, servicing and parking area to businesses at 14-17 Bancroft. The rear façade comprise grey brick and sash windows at upper floor level, with the ground floor level host to various modern commercial installations including access doors, external access stairs to upper floors, louvres and bin storage installations. The rear façade of no. 16 specifically faces away from the heart of the Conservation Area, and is blocked from view on Grammar School Walk by residential properties. It can therefore be determined the rear façade and back of house area are neutral contributors to the sites significance and the Conservation Area.

The site is located within the Hitchin Conservation Area. As the site is located on designated retail frontage, with continuous passing pedestrian traffic in and out of the town centre, it is considered to be a prominent location, with the front elevation being viewed extensively from various points on Bancroft and Hermitage Road. The building positively contributes to the Conservation Area through its architectural appearance; as identified above, this is predominantly generated through the identified features and materials at upper floor levels. Whilst there is no uniformed approach taken to shopfront arrangements in the site's immediate surroundings, it is acknowledged that the existing shopfront is host to traditional features contributing to the attractiveness of this retail frontage.

Application Proposals

In summary, the proposed works to the externals and internals, to facilitate occupation by Gail's are listed below. For ease of reference, these have been split into internal and external works:

Internals

- Installation of new fixtures relating to proposed use as Café/Bakery, including: partitions, counters, re-heating equipment, food and drink preparation areas, sinks, shelves, customer seating, storage, and customer and staff restrooms. Minor reconfiguration to drainage layout to facilitate kitchen/washing up areas and new WCs.

Externals

- Use of hardstanding area immediately to the rear of no. 16 Bancroft for outdoor seating;
- Installation of new mosaic tiles to shopfront entrance floor;
- Installation of a metal awning box and retractable fabric awning with lettering to valance;
- Installation of externally illuminated fascia lettering, to be installed to right side of fascia band;
- Repainting of shopfront;

Assessment and Justification of Proposals

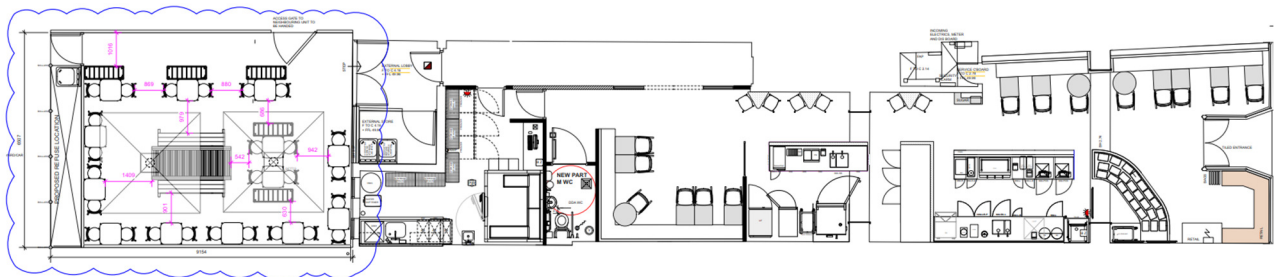
Use of Rear Yard

Gail's seek to utilise the area of hardstanding immediately to the rear of no. 16 Bancroft for an area of outdoor seating, to be used by customers looking to consume food and drink purchased from the premises. This area of hardstanding is not currently in commercial use, and its use will result in no loss of parking serving no. 16 or the neighbouring premises, nor result in loss of residential parking space or amenity. Access to residential properties at upper floor level will not be restricted as part of these proposals. Indeed, the rear hardstanding area of no. 17 Bancroft is also currently in use for outdoor seating by Craft & Cleaver, and previously by Prezzo, meaning that these proposals will not result in the addition of a feature not already present within the area.

The proposed area will not result in any alterations to the building and will not result in any harm to either the appearance of the building, nor the character of the Hitchin Conservation Area. Indeed, the utilisation of underused hardstanding will improve the function and vitality of a currently vacant commercial unit, supportive of the principles of North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policy SP4 which encourages the protection and enhancement of shops, cafes and restaurants within town centres.

Internals

The proposals seek a modest update to the internal facilities that work within the buildings existing structure, avoiding harm to any historic fabric. Works comprise the installation of new partitions, counters, re-heating equipment, food and drink preparation areas, sinks, shelves, customer seating, storage, and customer and staff restrooms, associated with a café/bakery use. The incorporation of these proposals have been guided by a minimal intervention approach and will ensure that the original internal structure is retained, whilst sufficiently facilitating the operational requirements of Gail's. All works are reversible and will not cause any harm to the building. Gail's also propose to utilise the existing M&E & HVAC routing and equipment, connecting to existing louvres and vents towards the rear of the building.



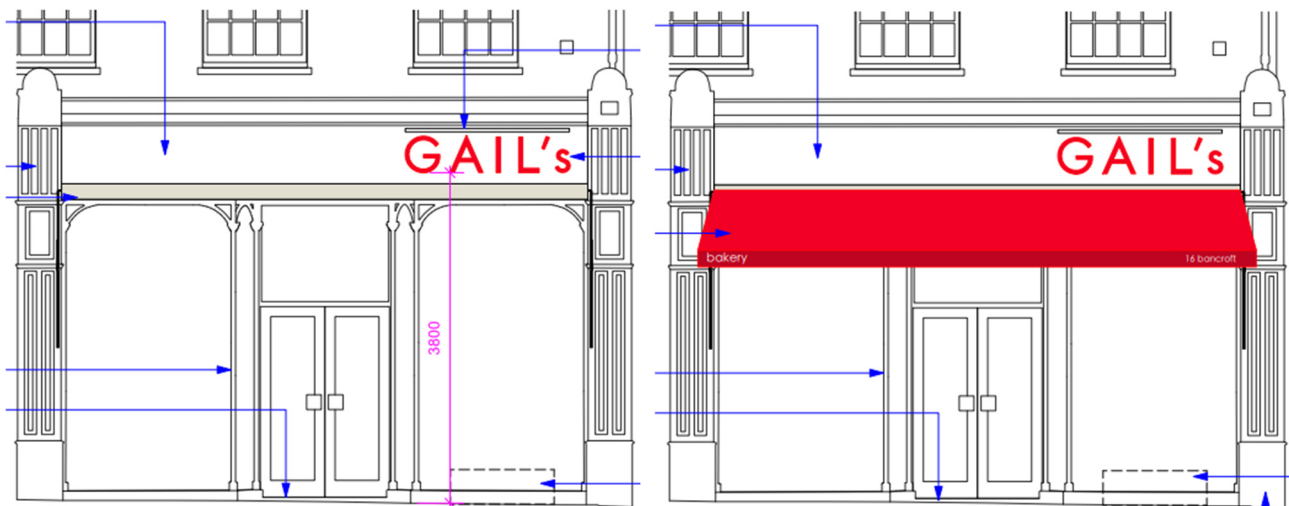
Indeed, the internal works collectively contribute to this commercial floorspace returning to viable use for the first time in four years, thus improving the viability and health of a town centre commercial unit. To this end, the works to the internal arrangement of the building will ensure complete compliance with North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policy SP13, which supports the preservation and enhancement of heritage assets.

It should be noted that Gail's are a long term occupier of their buildings and have a strong track record of maintaining listed buildings during their tenancy. Examples can be seen from Marlow, Epsom, Golders Green, Greenwich, Berkhamsted and Buckingham Palace Road, Westminster, where some initial minor works have led to a viable premises and the long term conservation of the buildings.

External Alterations and Advertisements

The proposals for the shopfront are minor in nature and will not give rise to harm to the architectural features of the wider building, nor result in any significant alteration to the buildings overall appearance or presence within the Conservation Area.

Consent is sought for the installation of an awning box and retractable fabric awning, to sit at the bottom of the fascia. The proposed installation will result in no harm or significant alteration to the structure or finish of the existing fascia, and will not result in the hiding of any attractive shopfront elements, nor result in the additional of a feature that can be considered overbearing. The awning will be traditional in respect of its design, mechanism and material, and to this end will relate to the building as an entity and as part of the Hitchin Conservation Area.



The proposed advertisements are also proportionate to the scale of the unit and are entirely inkeeping with the advertisement arrangements of surrounding shopfronts. The use of discrete external illumination for the proposed fascia lettering, illuminated via a concealed tube, avoids the use of bulky, illuminated box signs that the North Hertfordshire "Design Guide for a Shopfront in Hitchin" seeks to avert.

Indeed, these proposals offer a shopfront and advertisement arrangement entirely in-keeping with its commercial surroundings, and as previously stated, would result in minimal change to the existing arrangement and appearance of the shopfront. These collective works are traditional in character, are sensitive to the significance of the Listed Building and its contribution to the Hitchin Conservation Area, demonstrating complete compliance with Local Plan Policy SP13.

Summary

The documents submitted demonstrate that the proposals have been carefully considered to ensure they are in full accordance with the Local Development Plan, as well as national planning policy and heritage legislation. Overall, the proposals are not considered to result in harm to the building. In compliance with Paragraph 203 of the NPPF, which requires local authorities to take account of the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, the proposed alterations to the building's exterior and interior contribute to the re-occupation of a longstanding vacant commercial unit, bringing it back to viable use within this town centre location.

In support of this application, please find enclosed the following:

- Applications Forms;
- Application Fee of £458.00 (covering full planning and advertisement applications);
- Drawing Pack;
- Planning, Heritage, Design & Access Statement (included within this letter)

We trust that the application meets the council's validation requirements, but should you require anything further please do not hesitate in contacting the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,



James Baker

Planner

Planning Potential

London

Enc.