

Design, Access, Planning & Heritage Statement

Proposed single-storey extension and associated alterations

Site: Units 1–5, rear of 93–98 Bancroft, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1NQ

Applicant: Mr Paul Bhandal, Able Comm Limited

Agent: Pentangle Design Group, Suite 1, 21 Bancroft, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1JW

Job number: 3988

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Drawings: 3988/02 (Existing Ground Floor Plan and Elevations); 3988/04 Rev B (Proposed Ground Floor Plan, Section and Elevations); site location and block plans as submitted.

1. Introduction

This Statement is submitted by Pentangle Design Group on behalf of the applicant, Able Comm Limited, in support of a full planning application for a single-storey extension and associated alterations to the ground-floor commercial premises at Units 1–5, rear of 93–98 Bancroft, Hitchin.



The document combines the Design and Access Statement with a planning appraisal and a short Heritage Statement, the latter provided because the site lies within the Hitchin Conservation Area and in the vicinity of listed buildings fronting Bancroft. It should be read alongside the application drawings listed above and the completed application form.

The proposal is modest in scale. It provides a net increase of approximately 24 m² of Class E commercial floorspace and reconfigures the ground floor to create a series of individual retail units, together with new shopfronts to the elevation facing the Sainsbury's car park. The application seeks to bring flexible, well-located town-centre floorspace back into active use following the departure of the previous occupier.

2. The Site and Its Surroundings

2.1 Location and description

The application site comprises the ground-floor commercial element of a modern mixed-use building located to the rear of 93–98 Bancroft, Hitchin (National Grid Reference 518577, 229450). The site area is approximately 335 m².

The building was constructed in the early 2000s. It provides commercial (Class E) floorspace at ground-floor level with residential accommodation (Class C3) on the upper floors. The ground floor was designed to be sub-divisible to accommodate a range of unit sizes, but since construction it has been occupied as a single unit — most recently by Lloyds Pharmacy, which has now vacated.

The building presents its principal commercial frontage not to Bancroft itself but to the adjoining Sainsbury's supermarket car park, which forms its immediate and defining setting. The site has no dedicated parking, and none is proposed.



Site Photos: Top left: View through arch from Bancroft approaching the site; Top right: The flank wall of the existing building looking towards the supermarket car park; bottom: the existing building viewed from the supermarket.

2.2 Planning designations

The relevant designations affecting the site are:

- Within the Hitchin Conservation Area (designated 14 March 1969);
- Within Hitchin town centre, and the secondary retail area;
- To the rear of, and sharing a block with, the Grade II listed buildings that line the historic Bancroft frontage;
- Not within a flood risk area (Flood Zone 1) and not within 20 m of a watercourse.

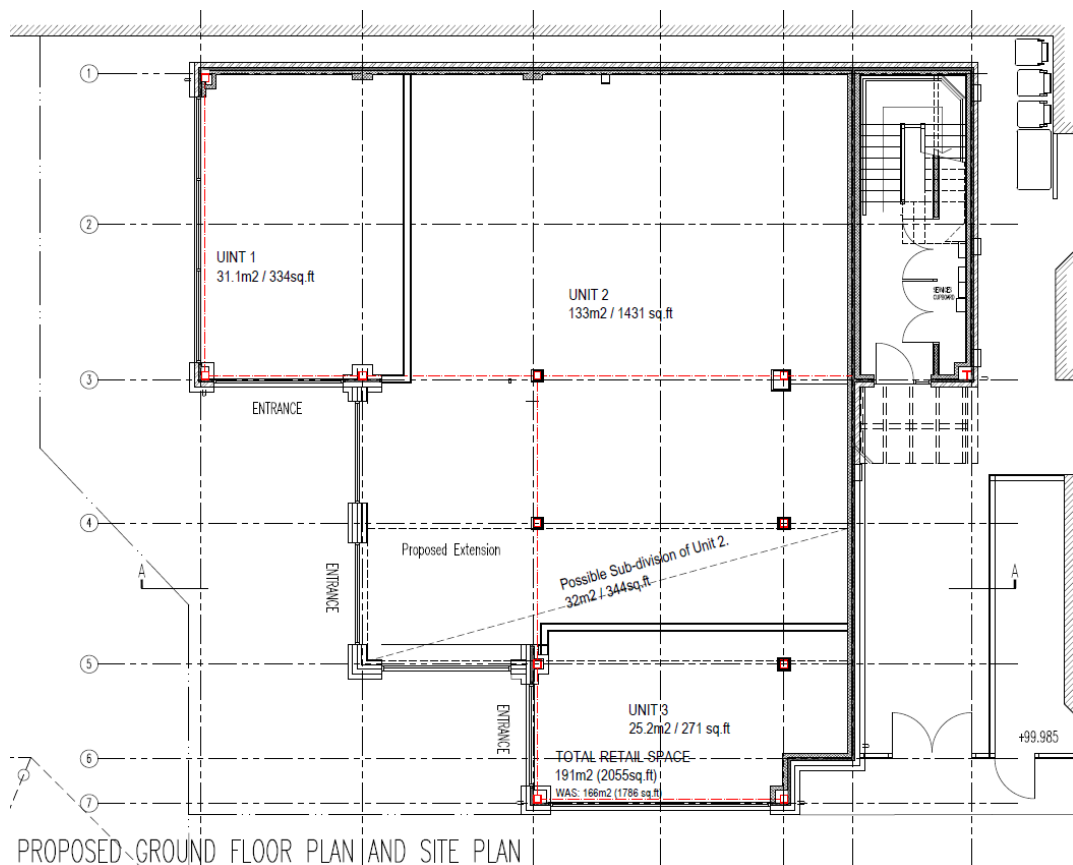
3. Planning History

The building was granted permission and constructed in the early 2000s as a mixed-use development (application ref: 03/00569/1). No other planning history is considered material to the determination of this application.

4. The Proposal

The application seeks full planning permission for:

- A single-storey extension to the elevation of the building facing the Sainsbury's car park, providing additional ground-floor commercial floorspace;
- Reconfiguration of the ground floor to create up to five individual commercial (Class E) units from the previously single unit; and
- New shopfronts and associated entrances to serve the reconfigured units.



4.1 Floorspace

The proposal increases the Class E(a) floorspace as follows (gross internal area):

Measure	Area
Existing commercial floorspace	166 m ² (1,786 sq ft)
Proposed commercial floorspace	circa 190–191 m ² (2,055 sq ft)
Net additional floorspace	approximately 24 m²

Drawing 3988/04B shows the ground floor sub-divided into units of approximately 31 m², 133 m² and 25 m², with provision for further sub-division of the larger unit. The unit layout is indicative and would be finalised in response to occupier demand; all units would remain within Use Class E.

4.2 Materials

External materials have been selected to sit comfortably with the existing modern building:

Element	Existing	Proposed
Roof	Plain tile	Single-ply membrane (flat roof to extension)
Walls	Facing brick and render	Facing brick
Windows / shopfronts	Timber and aluminium powder-coated shopfronts	Aluminium powder-coated shopfronts

The single-ply membrane relates to the flat roof of the single-storey extension and would not be visible in public views. Brick and aluminium shopfronts match the palette of the existing building.

5. Design

5.1 Use

The proposal retains and intensifies the established commercial (Class E) use of the ground floor. Creating smaller, individually accessible units improves the flexibility and lettability of the premises and supports the return of active retail and service uses to a town-centre location following the loss of the previous single occupier.

5.2 Amount and layout

The additional floorspace is minor — a net gain of approximately 24 m². The extension infills at ground-floor level on the car-park elevation, regularising the frontage and making more efficient use of the plot. The internal layout sub-divides the floorplate into individual units, each with its own entrance from the car-park side.

5.3 Scale

The extension is single-storey and clearly subordinate to the existing multi-storey building. It sits below the established eaves and roofline and does not increase the height or the residential accommodation above.



East Elevation

5.4 Appearance

The extension continues the language of the existing building — facing brickwork with aluminium powder-coated shopfronts — with a simple flat roof concealed behind the building line. The new shopfronts provide a coherent, contemporary retail frontage appropriate to the car-park setting. The design is deliberately restrained and makes no attempt to compete with the historic Bancroft frontage on the opposite side of the block.

5.5 Landscaping

The site is already fully covered by building and hardstanding, and no landscaping is proposed or lost. There is no change to soft or hard landscaping as a result of the proposal.

6. Access

There is no change to vehicular or pedestrian access to the public highway. Pedestrian access to the units is taken, as existing, from the adjoining Sainsbury's car park. The site has no dedicated parking and none is proposed; the position is unchanged from the existing situation and the premises benefit from the substantial public car parking serving the town centre.

The reconfigured units and new shopfronts would provide level or near-level access from the car-park frontage, consistent with inclusive access principles. Detailed compliance with Approved Document M would be addressed at Building Regulations stage.

Refuse storage provision will remain unchanged with the existing bin enclosure re-used.

7. Heritage Statement

This section is provided to satisfy the requirement to describe the significance of the heritage assets affected and to assess the impact of the proposal upon them, having regard to Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework and the statutory duties under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

7.1 The heritage assets

Two designated heritage interests are relevant:

- The Hitchin Conservation Area, which encompasses the historic core of the town. Its significance derives from the medieval street pattern, the historic buildings lining streets such as Bancroft, and the quality of the townscape and public realm.
- The Grade II listed buildings fronting Bancroft, which share a block with the application site. Their significance is architectural and historic, and includes their contribution to the historic Bancroft street scene.

The application building itself dates from the early 2000s. It is not a listed building nor a non-designated heritage asset, and it makes a broadly neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Its principal setting is the modern, functional Sainsbury's car park, which is of low townscape sensitivity.

7.2 Assessment of impact

The extension and new shopfronts are located on the elevation of the building facing the Sainsbury's car park — that is, on the opposite side of the building from Bancroft and from the listed buildings that front it. The works would not be readily visible from Bancroft or from the principal historic public realm of the Conservation Area, being screened by the intervening built form.

For these reasons it is considered that:

- There would be no harm to the setting or significance of the Grade II listed buildings fronting Bancroft; and
- There would be a neutral impact on the character and appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area — the modern building's neutral contribution would be preserved, with the works confined to a low-sensitivity car-park setting.

The proposal therefore preserves the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of the nearby listed buildings, consistent with the statutory duties under sections 66 and 72 of the 1990 Act, and results in no harm to designated heritage assets for the purposes of the NPPF.

8. Planning Policy and Assessment

The development plan for the area is the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 (adopted 8 November 2022). The National Planning Policy Framework and national Planning Practice Guidance are also material considerations. The following policies are the most relevant.

8.1 Design — Policies D1 and D3

Policy D1 (Sustainable Design) requires development to be of a high standard of design and to respect the character of its surroundings. Policy D3 (Protecting Living Conditions) requires that development does not cause unacceptable harm to the amenity of neighbouring occupiers. The proposal is a modest, single-storey, well-detailed addition that respects the existing building and its car-park setting. Given its scale, single-storey form and location away from residential frontages, it would not give rise to any material loss of amenity to neighbouring occupiers, including the residential accommodation above. The proposal accords with Policies D1 and D3.

8.2 Heritage — Policy HE1

Policy HE1 (Designated Heritage Assets) requires development to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the significance of designated heritage assets and their settings. For the reasons set out in Section 7, the proposal preserves the character and appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area and the setting of the nearby listed buildings, and accords with Policy HE1 and Section 16 of the NPPF.

8.3 Town centre and retail — Policies ETC3 and ETC4

The Local Plan's economy and town-centre policies (including Policy ETC3, New Retail, Leisure and Other Main Town Centre Development, and Policy ETC4, Primary Shopping Frontages) seek to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centres. The proposal supports these objectives: it retains commercial floorspace in Class E use, brings vacant town-centre premises back into active use, and improves flexibility by enabling occupation by a range of smaller businesses. The net increase in floorspace is minor and would not raise any retail impact or sequential-test concerns.

8.4 Other matters

Biodiversity net gain. The site is entirely covered by building and hardstanding. The development is considered to fall outside the scope of the mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement (de minimis / no impact on on-site habitat), as set out on the application form.

Flood risk and drainage. The site is within Flood Zone 1 and is not within 20 m of a watercourse. Foul and surface water would continue to discharge to the mains sewer. There is no increase in flood risk elsewhere.

Parking and highways. There is no change to the parking or access position; the premises are highly accessible within the town centre and served by nearby public car parking. No highway impact arises.

Contamination. The land is not known or suspected to be contaminated and the proposed use is not particularly vulnerable to contamination.

9. Conclusion

The proposal is a modest, single-storey extension and internal reconfiguration that brings vacant, flexible town-centre commercial floorspace back into active use. It is well designed, subordinate in scale, and uses materials appropriate to the existing modern building and its car-park setting.

Located on the elevation facing the Sainsbury's car park — away from Bancroft and the listed buildings that front it — the works cause no harm to the setting of the listed buildings and have a neutral impact on the character and appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area. The proposal accords with the development plan, including Policies D1, D3, HE1 and the economy and town-centre policies of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031, and with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Planning permission is respectfully requested.