

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION

APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	26/01937/fp
CASE OFFICER:	Will Thompson
APPLICATION SITE:	Hitchin Town Hall Brand Street Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 1HX
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Decarbonisation works including provision of secondary glazing to existing windows, the provision of insulation to the roof void above the main hall, replacement of mechanical plant including the removal of gas boilers and the installation of Photovoltaic (PV) panels and Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP)
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 20 of the NPPF (August 2026) and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.	
SUGGESTED CONDITIONS:	
None as the material are already specified within the application.	
SHORT SUMMARY:	
Impact on listed building's special character – <i>Hitchin Town Hall is a Neo-Georgian municipal building, built to the designs of (Thomas) Geoffrey Lucas in 1900-1, with E W Mountford as consulting architect. To the east of it is the 1868 Workmen's Hall by James Shilcock, with an early-20th-century gymnasium to the north. In c.2013-2015, the North Hertfordshire Museum was incorporated into the site, through a new development that infilled between the Town Hall, Workmen's Hall and gymnasium, and included a first-floor extension over the former gymnasium.</i> External Works Externally, the proposals include the addition of solar PV panels to modern, unlisted areas of the museum building roof, the removal and replacement of the east-facing dormer windows with ventilation grilles, and the siting of a stand of ASHPs enclosed in a fence with access gates. The proposed ASHPs enclosure fence would largely be hidden along Grammar School Walk but will be glimpsed when travelling past or entering the multi-storey carpark.	

The impact this will have on the setting of the listed building, and the conservation area is considered to be a low level of harm due to its location and the mitigation offered by screen.

The replacement windows to the east elevation with sensitively designed vents to support the replacement heating and ventilation system is considered result low level of harm.

Overall the external works will result in public benefit improving the long-term sustainable energy use of the listed building and therefore there are no objections.

Internal works

The proposals which include secondary glazing, new service runs using existing service routes, insulation within the roof void are all considered to have no harm on the listed building.

The new service runs will take advantage of existing routes, and the secondary glazing will sit within existing reveals with no disruption to appearance and therefore maintain character.

Site Context:

The Town Hall sits on the corner of Brand Street and Grammar School Walk with the Hitchin Conservation Area (character area 2). An extract is copied below.

Brand Street leads off High Street and represents a 19th century widening of a former alleyway. It has more mixed development than the other two streets and has suffered from a greater degree of modern infilling or redevelopment. The western end of the street is dominated by Hitchin Town Hall, built in 1900 and grade II listed. To the north-west is the former Friends Meeting House (grade II listed and now known as Centenary House) and located almost opposite the Town Hall on the south side of Brand Street, is the former Town Hall of 1840 (now 'Ivory'), which is also grade II listed and provides a rare example in the town centre of a substantial, stuccoed building. The corner into Paynes Park is marked by an unfortunate red brick block of offices, four storeys high and dating to the 1970s or 1980s. Beyond the current Friends Meeting House (a BLI) and to the west, is Thomas Bellamy House, an early to mid 19th century yellow brick grade II listed building marking the entrance into the conservation area from this direction.

Map 4 attached to the Conservation Area Statement (Character Area 2a) has identified a view 5 looking down towards Brand Street with the Town Hall on your left from Bedford Road.

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

[Please see summary section above.](#)

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

NPPF (August 2026):

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 policy paragraphs of Section 20 of the August 2026 version of the NPPF are detailed as follows

HE4: Securing the conservation of heritage assets

- 1. Heritage assets, as an irreplaceable resource, should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. To achieve this, development proposals which would affect the significance of heritage assets, including any contribution made by their setting should: a. Maintain or secure a use consistent with their conservation, taking into account the importance of maintaining the assets, the positive contribution they can make to sustainable communities including local economies, and the positive contribution they can make to local character and distinctiveness; and b. Avoid (or if that is not possible, minimise) harm to the significance of heritage assets, and instead conserve this significance.*
- 2. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (including from development within its setting) should have a clear and convincing justification in accordance with the policies in this chapter*

HE5: Assessing effects on heritage assets.

- 1. Development proposals affecting heritage assets should be accompanied by an assessment of the significance of the assets affected (including any contribution made by their setting) and of the potential effect of the proposal on their significance. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is necessary to understand the potential effect of the proposal on their significance. The relevant historic environment record should be referred to in making this assessment, and appropriate expertise employed where necessary.*
- 2. Assessments of the potential effects of development proposals on the significance of heritage assets (including through effects on their setting) should identify whether proposals would be likely to: a. Have a positive effect, which is where the significance of a heritage asset would be enhanced, or better revealed; or b. Have no effect on the significance of a heritage asset; or c. Result in harm to the significance of a heritage asset, either from work affecting the asset itself or from development within its setting. The degree of harm should be identified: substantial harm would occur where the development proposal would seriously affect a key element of the asset's significance; or d. Cause the total loss of the significance of a heritage asset.*
- 3. In making this assessment it is the effect on a heritage asset's significance rather than the scale of the development which should be considered.*
- 4. Decision-makers should be satisfied that assessments accurately reflect the effects on heritage assets caused by development proposals.*
- 5. Where a development proposal involves, or has the potential to involve, a heritage asset with archaeological interest, an appropriate desk-based assessment should be undertaken and, where necessary, a field evaluation. These should be used to help understand the asset's significance and the potential effect of the proposal on this, which should inform the design, mitigation and implementation of the development.*

HE6: Proposals affecting designated heritage assets.

- 1. When considering the potential effect of a development proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset, substantial weight should be given to the asset's conservation 96 (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential effect amounts to a positive effect, harm, substantial harm, or total loss of its significance.*
- 2. Development proposals which would have a positive effect on a designated heritage asset should be supported.*
- 3. Any harm to a designated heritage asset will be a matter of considerable importance and weight, which should be dealt with in accordance with paragraphs 4 to 6 of this policy.*
- 4. Where a development proposal would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset the effect on the asset and its significance should be weighed against any public benefits resulting from the proposal. Important public benefits can include securing the long-term reuse of a vacant or underused listed building, and enabling energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures to be employed.*
- 5. Where a development proposal would cause substantial harm to, or the total loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, consent should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the harm is*

necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss, or if all of the following apply: a. The nature of the heritage asset would otherwise prevent all reasonable uses of the site; b. No suitable use for the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; c. Conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is not possible; and d. The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the asset back into use.

6. Within this context, development which would cause substantial harm to, or the total loss of, the significance of grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional; while development which would cause substantial harm to, or the total loss of, assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional 64*

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: 30.9.2026