



HERITAGE STATEMENT

Statement of Significance and Assessment of Heritage Impact



Batch Bakery

The George, 2 Hitchin Street, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6AE

New shopfront canopy, signage and internal counter and servery fit-out

Application for Listed Building Consent

North Hertfordshire District Council

Prepared on behalf of **Dan Laffineur**

MCA Job No. 301 · 20 July 2026 ·

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Document control

Item	Detail
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Checked by	Mc
Site inspection	June 2026
Accompanying drawings	301-020 Rev [] Plans as existing and as proposed; 301-030 Rev [] Street (north-east) elevation as existing and as proposed, with canopy section
Status	For submission



1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this statement

- 1.1.1** This Heritage Statement has been prepared by Michael Collins Architects Ltd (MCA) on behalf of Mr Dan Laffineur to accompany an application for listed building consent for a new shopfront canopy, associated signage and an internal counter and servery fit-out to the ground-floor commercial unit at The George, 2 Hitchin Street, Baldock. The unit is to be occupied by Batch Bakery.
- 1.1.2** The George is listed Grade II and stands within the Baldock Conservation Area, immediately adjoining the pedestrian entrance to the churchyard of the Church of St Mary the Virgin, which is listed Grade I. The application site is therefore within, adjacent to, and in the setting of, designated heritage assets of the highest and of national importance respectively.
- 1.1.3** The statement is in two parts, as required by Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 and by Chapter 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026):
- a Statement of Significance (Section 4), which identifies what is significant about the affected heritage assets and why, including the contribution made by their setting; and
 - an Assessment of Heritage Impact (Section 7), which identifies and calibrates the effect of each element of the proposal on that significance, and sets out the mitigation proposed.
- 1.1.4** The proposals are modest in scale and, with the single qualification identified at Section 7.5 below, are designed to be reversible: they are conceived as a set of applied, demountable interventions that can be removed at the end of the tenancy without lasting alteration to historic fabric. Reversibility is central to the case made in this statement, and Section 7.2 sets out what is meant by the term and what limits apply to it.

1.2 Scope and what is not in issue

- 1.2.1** The subdivision of the ground floor of The George and the change of use that created this unit were the subject of a separate application for planning permission and listed building consent prepared by others and determined by North Hertfordshire District Council. Those consents are the starting point for the present proposals and are not revisited here.
- 1.2.2** The relevant decisions are (planning permission 26/00398/FP) and (listed building consent 26/00399/LBC).
- 1.2.3** This statement addresses only the works described in Section 6. It does not assess the structural condition of the building, and it is not a condition survey.

1.3 Methodology, sources and limitations

- 1.3.1** The assessment has been prepared by Michael Collins, Director of Michael Collins Architects Ltd, in accordance with Historic England guidance, in particular Historic England Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance (2019), Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment, and Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd edition, 2017). Significance is described using the categories of heritage interest set out in the Planning Practice Guidance and in Historic England's Conservation Principles.
- 1.3.2** The following sources have been consulted:

- the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) entries for the host building and for heritage assets in its vicinity;
- the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record;
- the Baldock Conservation Area designation
- the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 (adopted 8 November 2022) and North Hertfordshire Supplementary Planning Guidance No. 11, Design guide for a shopfront in Baldock (January 1998);
- historic Ordnance Survey mapping and published local histories of Baldock; and
- a site inspection carried out on the 26/06/26

1.3.3 A note on the list entry. The NHLE entry for the building is a brief legacy description of 1974. It contains evident transcription errors and, as Historic England makes clear, a list entry identifies the building and summarises its interest but is neither a complete description of the building nor a definition of the extent of what is protected. The whole of the listed building, including its interior and any object or structure fixed to it, is protected. Significance has therefore been assessed on the evidence of the building itself, informed by the list entry rather than limited to it.

2 The site and its designations

2.1 Location and description

- 2.1.1** Baldock lies in North Hertfordshire, at the point where the Icknield Way crosses the route of the Great North Road. The George occupies the pivotal corner site at the junction of Church Street and Hitchin Street, at the south-western end of the town's broad market streets and immediately south-east of the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin.
- 2.1.2** The building is a substantial former coaching inn, later a hotel and restaurant, of two principal storeys with attics, built of red brick beneath a hipped tiled roof, with tall brick chimneystacks. Its long principal elevation faces north-east across the paved public space at the junction. To the north-east the brick front terminates at the corner beside a lower, white-rendered range; an iron gate and short path alongside give pedestrian access into the churchyard. To the rear the site adjoins the churchyard and Coach Yard, the latter converted to flats in the early 2000s.
- 2.1.3** The application unit occupies the north-eastern end of the principal elevation — the bay nearest the churchyard entrance — comprising two ground-floor window openings and a doorway between them. Its statutory address is 2 Hitchin Street, the address under which the building is listed, although the elevation in which the unit sits addresses Church Street and the open junction.



Figure 1 Location plan. The George is outlined in red at the junction of Church Street and Hitchin Street, with St Mary the Virgin and its churchyard immediately to the north-west. Reproduced from drawing PL01. © Crown copyright and database rights.



Figure 2 The principal (north-east) elevation as existing, viewed from the Church Street / Hitchin Street junction. The application unit is the bay to the right, between the projecting swing sign and the white-rendered range. The gate to St Mary's churchyard is visible at the right-hand edge.

2.2 Designated heritage assets

2.2.1 The designated heritage assets that are, or may be, affected by the proposals are set out below.

Heritage asset	Designation	NHLE ref.	Relationship to the application site
The Old George and Dragon Hotel, 2 Hitchin Street (The George)	Listed Grade II, 15 August 1974; group value	1102077	Host building. The works are to its principal elevation and to a ground-floor interior.
Church of St Mary the Virgin, Church Street	Listed Grade I, 8 November 1949, amended 15 August 1974	1347611	Immediately north-west. The application unit flanks the pedestrian approach to the church through the churchyard gate.
Butterfield House, Hitchin Street	Listed Grade II*		To the west on Hitchin Street. Shared streetscape; no direct intervisibility with the works.
Tomb of William Clarkson, churchyard of St Mary the Virgin	Listed Grade II		Within the adjoining churchyard. No effect anticipated.
Nos 1, 1B, 3 and 5 Hitchin Street; Nos 2 to 16 (even) Hitchin Street	Listed Grade II, group value	various	The George is listed as part of the group Nos 2 to 16 (even). Streetscape relationship.
Baldock Conservation Area	Conservation area	—	The site lies within the conservation area, at one of its most prominent corners.



2.2.2 Archaeology. Baldock is an archaeological site of national importance: the Roman small town and its extensive cemeteries underlie much of the modern settlement, and the medieval planned town overlies it. The proposals involve no excavation, no ground disturbance and no disturbance of below-ground deposits. There is accordingly no archaeological implication, and no archaeological condition is considered necessary.

2.3 Planning history

2.3.1 The relevant recent history of the building, as set out in the statement prepared by Intouch Planning Ltd in January 2024, is summarised below.

Reference	Description	Decision
04/00931/1	Conversion of part of the former restaurant building into 6 dwellings (variation of 01/1678/1)	Permitted
07/02593/1PUD	Use as restaurant / café at ground floor and hotel accommodation at first floor	Certificate of lawfulness granted
11/01138/1 and 11/01139/1LB	External and internal alterations including replacement of rear flat roof with pitched roof, insertion of a third-floor window and internal rearrangement at first floor	Permitted; listed building consent granted
22/01853/FP and 22/01854/LBC	Part change of use and conversion of the ground-floor restaurant to two residential flats, with new rear windows and internal alterations	Withdrawn
[REF] (2024)	Part change of use of the ground-floor restaurant to provide four hotel rooms and one retail and bar unit, with insertion of two windows to the rear elevation and internal alterations	Permitted / listed building consent granted

2.3.2 The 2024 consents established the principle of a subdivided ground floor containing an independent commercial unit with its own entrance from the street, and the acceptability in heritage terms of forming that unit. The conservation officer's engagement with the 2024 scheme included the position of the sub-dividing wall relative to the inglenook fireplace, which was revised to give the fireplace a more generous setting. That approach — respecting and revealing the historic features of the ground floor rather than enclosing them — is carried forward in the fit-out now proposed.

2.3.3 The unit has stood vacant since the ground floor ceased to be used as a restaurant. Securing its occupation is the purpose of the present application.

3 Historical development

3.1 Baldock

- 3.1.1** Baldock is a planned town of the twelfth century, laid out by the Knights Templar on land granted by Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, at the crossing of the Icknield Way and the north road. The Templars built the first church of St Mary in about 1150; following their suppression the manor and advowson passed to the Knights Hospitaller, who largely rebuilt and enlarged the church in about 1330. The unusually broad market streets that characterise the town centre are a direct expression of that deliberate twelfth-century foundation as a market and trading place.
- 3.1.2** The town's later prosperity rested on its position on the Great North Road. Through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Baldock was a significant coaching stop, and its principal streets were lined with inns, maltings and brewing premises serving that trade. The survival of a number of large inns, with carriage arches and rear yards, is one of the defining characteristics of the historic core and of the conservation area.

3.2 The George

- 3.2.1** The George, historically the George and Dragon, is one of the principal surviving coaching inns of the town. Its scale, its prominent corner position at the head of the market streets, its rear yard — still called Coach Yard — and its long association with the hospitality trade all attest to that role.
- 3.2.2** The list description records an early nineteenth-century front of red brick with a slightly projecting centre flanked by two-storey wings, beneath a hipped tiled roof; sash windows with glazing bars set in reveals under flat arches, arranged in a one-three-one rhythm; arched panels at ground floor to the three central windows and a dummy window at the centre of each floor; parapets to the roof and a brick modillion cornice above the second floor; and a modern wing to the left. The full text of the entry should be read alongside this statement.

List entry.

The present George & Dragon has an early 19th century front of red brick with slightly projecting 3-storey centre between 2-storey wings, roof parapets and a hipped tiled roof; a dummy window in the centre of each floor. The additional wing on the left is 20th century <1>. The earliest record dates to 1591; from 1692 rent was paid to the rector for ground taken from the churchyard to increase stabling. It was visited by George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, in 1655 and thereafter it was favoured by travelling Quakers. It was bought by John Pryor, the Baldock brewer, in 1777; it was not the leading coaching inn of Baldock until after the closure of the White Horse in the 1860s <2, 7>.

The George & Dragon was closed and boarded up early in 1998 and an attempt made to sell it for housing, but after local protest it was renovated and reopened in August 1999 <3>.

Before the present churchyard gate was put up c.1870 the inn stables ran along the street frontage here. These are shown on the c.1850 tithe map <4>, lining a long rectangular yard which occupied the southern boundary of the churchyard, and presumably occupied the land rented from the rector from 1692.

National Heritage List for England, entry 1102077, The Old George and Dragon Hotel, listed 15 August 1974, Grade II, group value. Listing NGR TL2443633898.

- 3.2.3** The list entry describes the building as it presents to the street. It does not describe the interior, and it should not be read as implying that the building is wholly of the early nineteenth century. The early

nineteenth-century brick front is characteristic of the refronting of older inns that took place widely along the Great North Road in that period, when coaching traffic was at its height and proprietors sought a fashionable, polite façade. The survival at ground floor of an inglenook fireplace, chamfered beams and fielded panelling indicates that a substantially earlier core — probably of the seventeenth century or before, and in part timber-framed — survives behind that front.

- 3.2.4** This inference is consistent with the pattern established by the neighbouring listed buildings on Hitchin Street, several of which are recorded as sixteenth- or seventeenth-century buildings later refronted in brick or stucco, and one of which is expressly noted as retaining seventeenth-century panelling. It should nevertheless be confirmed by inspection and recorded. The existing panelling within unit 1a subject to the works, appears to have been subject to change and alteration with modern beading profiles and layers of paint. Existing timber beams are visible but a new structural opening carried out with steel is visible internally.
- 3.2.5** The building has been altered repeatedly in the modern period. Part of the complex was converted to six dwellings in the early 2000s; the ground floor was fitted out as a restaurant after 2007, at which point the present internal partitions, linings, services and finishes within the application unit were installed; and further alterations to the roof and first floor were consented in 2011. The unit as it stands is therefore a largely modern interior set within historic structure.

4 Statement of significance

4.1 Summary

- 4.1.1** The George is significant as one of Baldock's principal surviving coaching inns: a building whose early nineteenth-century brick front, deliberate and polite in its composition, expresses the confidence of the coaching trade on the Great North Road, and behind which earlier fabric survives from the inn's longer history. Its significance is enhanced by its position. It stands at the pivot of the historic town, terminating the Church Street frontage, forming one side of the approach to the Grade I parish church, and anchoring the group of listed buildings with which it is listed. It has been in public and commercial use for centuries, and that continued public use is itself part of what the building means to the town.

4.2 Assessment by heritage interest

Architectural and artistic interest

- 4.2.1** The principal architectural interest lies in the early nineteenth-century north-east elevation: the quality and colour of its red brickwork, the modillion cornice and parapet, the hipped tiled roof and tall chimney stacks behind, and above all the disciplined rhythm of its openings — sashes with glazing bars set in reveals under flat arches, arranged symmetrically about a projecting centre. The elevation reads as a single, calm and unified composition running the length of the frontage, and it is by this face that the building is understood and valued. This interest is high in the context of a Grade II listing.
- 4.2.2** The interest of the elevation is compositional as much as it is a matter of individual features. Its coherence depends on the continuity of the brickwork as an uninterrupted plane, on the regularity of the openings, and on the consistency of the joinery and its decoration across the whole frontage. Interventions that break that continuity, or that treat one bay differently from the rest, engage this interest directly — a point returned to in the assessment at Section 7.
- 4.2.3** The surviving pre-nineteenth-century features at ground floor — the fireplaces, beams and the fielded panelling — are of interest. They are the principal physical evidence of the building's earlier form, they are comparatively rare survivals in a ground floor that has otherwise been substantially reworked, and they carry the building's history as an inn rather than as a nineteenth-century hotel.

Historic interest

- 4.2.4** The building has illustrative historic interest as a coaching inn: it demonstrates, in its scale, plan and position, how the Great North Road shaped the economy and fabric of a small Hertfordshire market town. It has associative interest with the commercial life of Baldock over several centuries and with the group of inns and trading premises along Hitchin Street and the High Street. The building's continuity of hospitality use — inn, hotel, restaurant — is itself an aspect of its historic interest.

Archaeological and evidential interest

- 4.2.5** The fabric of the building holds evidential value: the concealed earlier structure, blocked and altered openings, and changes in brickwork all carry information about how the building developed. Below ground, the site lies within the archaeologically sensitive core of Baldock. Neither aspect is engaged by the present proposals, which involve no excavation and no opening up of historic fabric.

Communal interest

- 4.2.6** The George has been publicly accessible for the whole of its history. It is a landmark by which people orientate themselves in the town, its name is attached to the space in front of it, and generations of

residents have used it. Communal value of this kind depends on the building remaining in use and open. A vacant ground floor at this corner diminishes it.

4.3 Gradation of significance

4.3.1 The following table grades the significance of the elements of the building that are relevant to this application. It is intended to make explicit which fabric the proposals engage and which they do not.

Element	Significance	Comment
Early C19 north-east elevation: brickwork, flat arches, modillion cornice, parapet, and the composition of the openings	High	The principal architectural interest of the building and the face by which it is read in the conservation area.
Hipped tiled roof, chimneystacks	High	Not affected by these proposals.
Fireplaces including the inglenook; chamfered beams; fielded panelling at ground floor	moderate	Evidence of the pre-C19 inn. To be retained in situ and protected the works do not impact this.
Historic sash windows and joinery to the principal elevation, where original	Medium to high	Extent of original joinery within the application unit to be confirmed. Affected by the proposed redecoration only.
Ground-floor plan form of the unit as legible through surviving structure	Medium	Unaltered by the proposals; the fit-out is freestanding.
Existing shop-type ground-floor window to the application unit	To be confirmed	If a later insertion, low; if an early shopfront window, medium. Not altered by the proposals in either case.
Projecting swing sign and its wrought-iron bracket	Sign: low. Bracket: low to medium	The bracket may be of C20. See 7.4.
Late C20 and C21 partitions, linings, suspended services, floor and wall finishes within the unit	Neutral / none	Installed for the post-2007 restaurant fit-out. No constraint on the proposals.
Modern wing to the left of the principal elevation	Low	Identified as modern in the list entry. Not affected.

4.4 Contribution of the application unit to the significance of the whole

- 4.4.1** In terms of fabric, the unit makes a modest contribution. Its interior has been substantially reworked and what is now present is overwhelmingly of the last two decades, with the important exception of the fireplaces, beams and panelling.
- 4.4.2** In terms of the building's significance as a whole, however, the unit matters disproportionately, for two reasons. First, it forms part of the principal elevation, and any change here is change to the most significant external face of the building. Second, its occupation is what sustains the building: the communal and historic interest identified above depend on The George continuing to be a place the public uses, and a dark, empty ground floor at the corner of the conservation area erodes that.

4.5 Setting, and contribution to the Baldock Conservation Area

- 4.5.1** The character and appearance of the Baldock Conservation Area derive principally from the planned medieval street pattern and the exceptional breadth of the market streets; from the parish church as the dominant landmark and focal point; from the varied but consistently scaled frontages of brick,

render and timber-framing that line those streets; and from the surviving commercial grain of a market and coaching town, with active ground floors, inns, yards and passages.

- 4.5.2** The George makes a strong positive contribution to that character. It closes the view from the High Street junction, it gives the corner its weight and formality, and it provides the built edge against which the churchyard is read. The narrow gap between the brick front and the rendered range beyond, with its gate and path, is an important townscape incident: it is the point at which the busy commercial street opens quietly into the churchyard, and it frames the approach to the Grade I church.
- 4.5.3** The setting of the Church of St Mary the Virgin, as experienced from Church Street, is of a medieval church reached through a gap in a continuous historic street frontage. That frontage has been commercial for as long as the church has stood there. Shops, inns and their signs are not an intrusion into that setting; they are a constituent part of it. What would harm it is not commercial activity as such, but over-scaled, illuminated or strident signage drawing the eye away from the approach to the church, or clutter accumulating at the churchyard gate.
- 4.5.4** Historic England's Good Practice Advice Note 3 directs attention to the experience of the asset from key viewpoints. The relevant views here are: north-eastward along Church Street towards the junction; from the open paved space in front of the building; and the short, enclosed view at the churchyard gate itself. The first two are commercial townscape views in which the application unit is read with the rest of the street. The third is the sensitive one, and it is the view against which the signage proposals must principally be tested.

4.6 Vulnerability and current condition

- 4.6.1** Three issues currently detract from the significance of the building and of this part of the conservation area:
- the vacancy of the ground floor of the application unit, which removes activity from the most prominent frontage in the conservation area and leaves the windows blank;
 - the accumulation of applied signage and fixings on the principal elevation, including letting boards, the projecting swing sign and associated ironmongery, brackets, lamps and service equipment, which together read as clutter against an elevation whose interest lies in its plainness and regularity; and
 - the self-clinging climber established across the upper part of the brick front and the parapet. Vegetation of this kind holds moisture against the wall, works into open joints and obscures the cornice and parapet that the list entry identifies as being of interest. Its removal and the subsequent repointing of any damaged joints do not form part of this application, but are recommended to the building owner as a separate matter.

5 Statutory and policy framework

5.1 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 5.1.1 Section 16(2) of the Act requires the decision-maker, in considering whether to grant listed building consent, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Section 66(1) imposes the equivalent duty on the determination of planning applications affecting a listed building or its setting. Section 72(1) requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
- 5.1.2 The courts have established that these are duties of considerable importance and weight, and that where harm to a designated heritage asset is identified, that harm must be given such weight even where it is slight. This statement is written on that basis: it does not assert that the proposals are without effect where they have one.
- 5.1.3 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 provides for the extension of the statutory special regard duties to other categories of designated heritage asset and their settings. The Government confirmed in August 2026 that it intends to implement those provisions, with accompanying guidance. They are not yet in force and do not alter the duties engaged by this application.

5.2 National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026)

- 5.2.1 A revised National Planning Policy Framework was published on 17 August 2026 and replaced the Framework of December 2024. Chapter 20 deals with conserving and enhancing the historic environment through policies HE1 to HE10, and restructures national heritage policy substantially. The change is material to how this statement is written, and to how earlier heritage statements for this building should now be read.
- 5.2.2 Two changes matter here. First, the term "less than substantial harm" no longer appears in national policy. Harm is now identified and calibrated directly, with total loss and substantial harm treated as distinct and more demanding categories. It would be wrong simply to substitute the word "harm" wherever the old phrase appeared; the assessment has to state what the effect on significance actually is. Second, the concept of the "optimum viable use" has been removed, and the Framework instead gives positive support to bringing vacant and underused historic buildings back into long-term viable use.
- 5.2.3 Policy HE9 deals specifically with conservation areas. Policy TC2 gives substantial weight to the benefits of supporting the vitality and viability of town centres, including through retaining access to local shops and facilities.
- 5.2.4 North Hertfordshire Supplementary Planning Guidance No. 11, *Design guide for a shopfront in Baldock* (January 1998), remains in use by the Council and is directly relevant to the canopy and signage elements of this application.

5.3 Advertisement control

- 5.3.1 Signage is controlled separately from listed building consent, under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007, in which the tests are amenity and public safety. Listed building consent and advertisement consent are distinct consents with distinct tests, and both are required for those elements of this scheme that constitute advertisements displayed on a listed building. The consent regime applying to each element of the proposal is set out at Section 6.3.

6 The proposals

6.1 Design intent

- 6.1.1** The applicant, Mr Dan Laffineur, operates Batch 52, an established cafe business already trading from premises opposite the application site. The proposal is to open a bakery and counter service in the vacant ground-floor unit at The George. The commercial requirement is a legible shop entrance, weather protection over the entrance and window, a modest amount of identification, and a counter and servery arrangement capable of supporting a bakery operation.
- 6.1.2** The design responds to that requirement through a deliberately restrained and applied approach. Nothing is removed from the historic fabric; no opening is altered, enlarged or formed; no historic joinery is replaced; and the internal fit-out is conceived as freestanding joinery standing within the historic room rather than built into it. In terms of the exterior the palette is a single dark tone against red brick consistent with the premises opposite, which is the traditional shopfront treatment of this part of Hertfordshire and which the existing frontage of the building already employs in its dark-painted ironmongery and lamps.
- 6.1.3** Two features of the scheme are worth drawing out as positive heritage decisions. The fireplace within the unit is treated as a display element rather than being boxed in or backed by fitted equipment, carrying forward the approach agreed with the conservation officer in 2024. And the existing projecting swing sign, an applied modern item, is to be removed, with a smaller and better-made sign taking its place.

6.2 Schedule of works

- 6.2.1** The works are shown on drawings 301-020 and 301-030 and are as follows. Dimensions are taken from the canopy section on drawing 301-030.

Ref	Element	Description
a	Redecoration of existing joinery	Existing sash and case windows and the existing door to the application unit to be redecorated in black. No joinery is to be removed, replaced or altered. Existing glazing bars and glass retained.
b	New canopy with fascia	New fixed canopy over the shop window and entrance to the application unit, with an integral fascia carrying the words BATCH BAKERY in applied lettering. Projection approximately 1438 mm from the face of the wall; underside approximately 2843 mm above pavement level; top of fascia approximately 4488 mm above pavement level. Supported on a limited number of concealed brackets fixed back to the wall.
c	Painted graphic	Painted graphic reading BATCH applied to the brickwork of the principal elevation to the north-east of the shop window, in a single light tone with a distressed, unoutlined finish in the manner of a traditional painted wall sign. Not illuminated. See Section 7.5, which addresses this element in detail.
d	New projecting sign	New circular projecting sign, approximately 686 mm wide by 873 mm overall, carrying the bakery device. Not illuminated.

Ref	Element	Description
e	Removal of existing sign	Existing projecting swing sign to The George removed. The existing bracket to be assessed and, if of historic interest, retained in situ.
f	Internal counter and servery	New freestanding counter and servery run, rear counter display, bread and cookie display, wheeled tray dock, glazed screens, wall shelving, window seat and bench seating, all as shown on drawing 301-020. The fireplace is retained and treated as a display feature. Existing beams and panelling retained in situ.
g	External seating	Small external seating area on the paved forecourt beneath the canopy. Loose furniture only; no fixed structures, no fixings into the ground.



Figure 3 Street (north-east) elevation as existing, drawing 301-030.



Figure 4 Street (north-east) elevation as proposed, with canopy section, drawing 301-030. Key: (a) existing sash and case windows and door redecorated black; (b) new canopy with fascia; (c) painted graphic applied to brickwork; (d) new projecting sign; (e) existing swing sign removed.



Figure 5 Visualisation of the proposals in context, showing the relationship of the unit to the churchyard entrance and to St Mary the Virgin beyond.

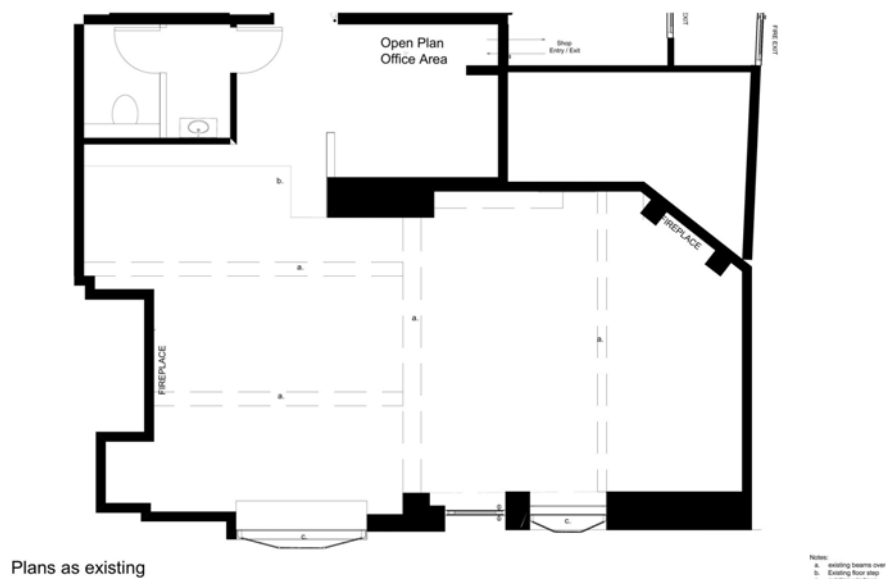


Figure 6 Ground floor plan as existing, drawing 301-020, showing existing beams over, the existing floor step, the existing windows and the fireplaces.

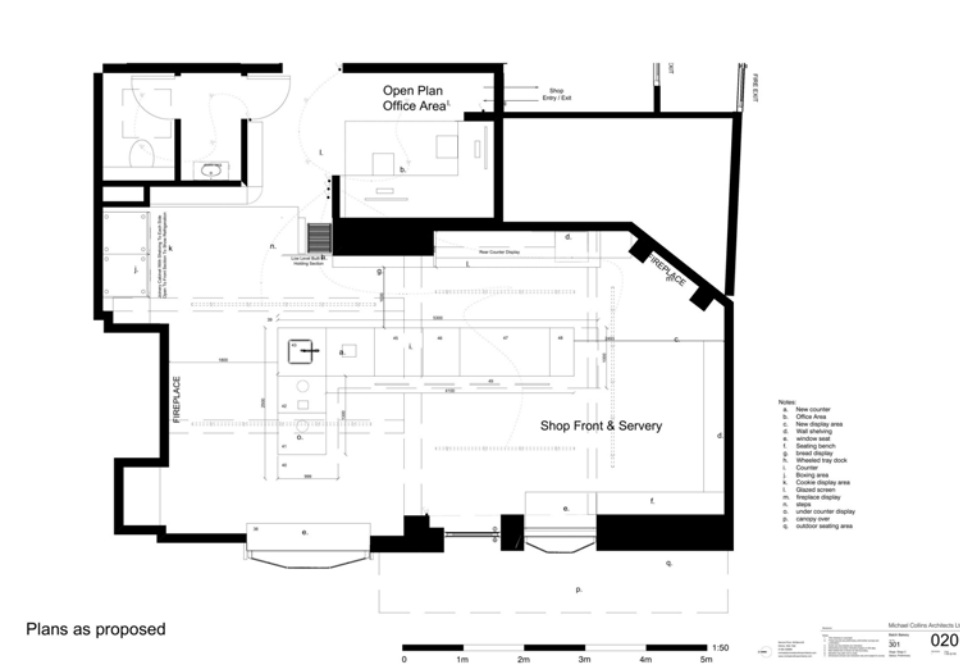


Figure 7 Ground floor plan as proposed, drawing 301-020, showing the freestanding counter and servery run, the fireplace retained as a display feature, and the external seating area beneath the canopy.

6.3 Consents required

6.3.1 The table below sets out MCA’s view of the consents engaged by each element. It should be confirmed with the Council before submission so that the applications are made and validated together and determined as a single package.

Element	Listed building consent	Advertisement consent	Planning permission	Other
(a) Redecoration of joinery in black	Yes — alteration affecting character	No	No	—



Element	Listed building consent	Advertisement consent	Planning permission	Other
(b) Canopy	Yes	No (the canopy itself)	Likely — projection over the public highway	Highway authority consent / licence
(b) Fascia lettering	Yes — display on a listed building	Yes	No	—
(c) Painted graphic on brickwork	Yes	Yes	No	—
(d) New projecting sign	Yes	Yes	No	—
(e) Removal of existing swing sign and bracket	Yes	—	No	—
(f) Internal counter and servery fit-out	Yes — internal works affecting character	No	No	—
(g) External seating on the forecourt	No	No	Possibly, depending on land ownership and duration	Pavement licence if on the public highway
Use of the unit as a bakery with counter service	—	—	[CONFIRM] — check the wording and conditions of the 2024 permission	Premises registration; food hygiene

7 Assessment of heritage impact

7.1 Approach

- 7.1.1** Each element of the proposal is assessed below against the significance identified in Section 4, and the effect on significance is then stated in the terms required by NPPF Policy HE5. The assessment considers the host listed building, the setting of nearby designated heritage assets, and the character and appearance of the Baldock Conservation Area.

7.2 Reversibility: what is claimed, and what is not

- 7.2.1** The scheme relies substantially on reversibility, and it is important to be precise about what that means. An intervention is properly described as reversible where it can be removed without lasting alteration to historic fabric and where the appearance of the asset before the intervention can be recovered. Fixings into mortar joints that can be raked out and repointed meet that test. Applied joinery standing on a floor meets it. Redecoration meets it.
- 7.2.2** Two qualifications follow, and both are accepted here. First, reversibility mitigates harm; it does not remove it. For as long as an intervention is in place it affects how the asset is experienced and understood, and that effect has to be assessed on its own terms. Second, reversibility is a property of the detail, not of the concept: the same canopy is reversible if it is fixed through mortar joints on stainless brackets and is not reversible if it is bolted through the face of hand-made brick. The mitigation schedule at Section 8 is therefore not a set of optional refinements but the basis on which the assessment below is made.
- 7.2.3** One element of the scheme as drawn — the painted graphic at (c) — cannot properly be described as reversible. This is addressed openly at Section 7.5, with options for resolving it.

7.3 Canopy and fascia (elements b)

- 7.3.1** The canopy introduces a horizontal element and a dark fascia across a part of the elevation that is at present unbroken brickwork. As set out at Section 4.2.2, the interest of this elevation is compositional, and the proposal engages that interest directly. It would be wrong to characterise the canopy as having no effect.
- 7.3.2** Several factors limit that effect. The canopy is confined to a single bay at the end of the frontage and does not interrupt the projecting centre or the principal composition. It sits wholly below the first-floor cill band, so the rhythm of the upper openings, the cornice and the parapet — the elements the list entry identifies — are untouched. Its underside at approximately 2.84 m above the pavement is well clear of the ground-floor heads and of pedestrians. And a canopy over a shop is a legible, traditional and historically appropriate feature on the commercial frontage of a market town; it reads as what it is, a piece of shop furniture, and not as an alteration to the building.
- 7.3.3** The depth of the fascia is the aspect most likely to attract comment, since a deep unrelieved band of dark colour will register more strongly against the brickwork than the canopy itself. The mitigation at Section 8 accordingly includes minimising fascia depth, aligning the canopy precisely with the width of the openings it serves, and terminating it against a pier rather than running it past one.
- 7.3.4** The applied lettering on the fascia is on the canopy, not on the building, and has no effect on historic fabric. At the scale shown, in a single tone and without illumination, it is appropriate to the frontage.

- 7.3.5** Effect: harm to the architectural interest of the principal elevation, at the low end of the scale, wholly reversible, and arising from the presence of the canopy rather than from any loss of or damage to historic fabric.

7.4 Projecting sign, and removal of the existing swing sign (elements d and e)

- 7.4.1** The proposal substitutes one projecting sign for another. The existing swing sign is a modern item, larger than the sign proposed, and carries text and a telephone number; the replacement is a small circular sign with a simple device and no illumination. On the elevation as a whole this is a simplification.
- 7.4.2** The heritage question is the bracket, not the sign. Sign brackets on former coaching inns are frequently of nineteenth-century or earlier date and are often of more interest than anything hung from them; where that is the case the bracket is part of the listed building and should be retained. The best outcome for the building is that the existing bracket is retained in situ and the new sign hung from it, which would also mean no new fixings into the brickwork at all.
- 7.4.3** The bracket has not yet been assessed. The mitigation schedule provides for its retention unless it is demonstrably modern, and for any redundant fixing holes to be made good in lime mortar.
- 7.4.4** Effect: no effect on significance, and a potential minor positive effect through the reduction of applied clutter on the elevation and the retention of historic ironwork.

7.5 Painted graphic on brickwork (element c)

- 7.5.1** This is the element requiring the closest scrutiny, and this statement does not advance it as reversible.
- 7.5.2** The case in its favour is a real one. Painted signs applied directly to brick flank walls and gable ends are a genuine and widespread tradition in English market towns, and the surviving examples — now generally called ghost signs — are increasingly valued as historic features in their own right. The graphic proposed is designed squarely within that idiom: a single light tone, no outline, no panel, no illumination, and a deliberately worn finish. Placed on a plain area of walling to one side of the shop window, it identifies the premises without any of the apparatus of modern fascia signage. As an approach to signing a historic building it is more sympathetic than most of the alternatives.
- 7.5.3** The difficulty is technical rather than aesthetic. Paint applied directly to historic brickwork is not reversible in the ordinary sense. The brick here is likely to be relatively soft and hand-made, with a fired surface that gives the wall much of its weathering resistance. Removing paint from such a surface requires abrasive or chemical methods, both of which risk taking the fired face with the paint, and residual staining and ghosting commonly persist even after careful removal. A modern film-forming paint would also reduce the vapour permeability of the wall locally, with the risk of moisture being trapped behind the coating and of frost damage at the paint edge.
- 7.5.4** There is a second consideration of position. The graphic sits at the north-eastern end of the frontage, which is the part of the elevation read in the same views as the approach to the churchyard gate — the sensitive view identified at Section 4.5.4. Of all the elements of the scheme, this is the one most likely to be experienced alongside the Grade I church.
- 7.5.5** Three routes are available, in descending order of preference from a conservation standpoint.
- Apply the graphic to a lime-based sacrificial shelter coat or limewash laid over the brickwork, so that the graphic sits on a sacrificial breathable layer rather than on the brick itself. The layer, and with it the graphic, can be removed without touching the fired face. This is the standard conservation solution to precisely this problem and it delivers the intended appearance.

- Relocate the graphic to the adjoining rendered or previously painted surface, or render it on a demountable panel fixed through mortar joints, in either case avoiding unpainted historic brickwork entirely.
- If it is to be applied directly, use a fully breathable mineral paint — a silicate or limewash system — applied following an approved trial panel, with a written removal methodology agreed in advance and secured by condition.

7.5.6 Effect, as drawn: harm to the architectural interest of the principal elevation at a low to moderate level, and a change that is not reversible. With the first or second option above: harm at the low end of the scale, fully reversible, and with no residual effect on historic fabric on removal.

7.5.7 It is recommended that this element be discussed with the conservation officer at pre-application stage and that the application be made on the basis of the shelter-coat solution, with a condition requiring approval of a trial panel.

7.6 Redecoration of existing joinery (element a)

7.6.1 Redecoration is reversible in principle: paint can be removed and the joinery redecorated in another colour. No fabric is lost. Two points nevertheless arise.

7.6.2 The first is practical. The extent to which the existing sashes and door are original is not established, and paint applied over historic joinery can obscure evidence and, if an inappropriate modern coating is used, trap moisture in the timber. A paint scrape and a straightforward record of the existing decorative scheme before redecoration is a proportionate step and may also yield evidence of the frontage's earlier colour.

7.6.3 The second is compositional and is more likely to attract comment from the Council. The joinery across the whole of this frontage is at present painted white, and that consistency is part of what allows the elevation to read as a single composition. Painting the joinery of one bay black would set that bay apart from the rest of the listed building and would read as the detachment of a tenancy from its host. That is a real, if modest, effect on the architectural interest identified at Section 4.2.2, and it is one that can be avoided at no cost to the scheme.

7.6.4 Two alternatives are offered to the Council. Either the dark treatment is confined to the shopfront elements — the canopy, its fascia and the entrance door — with the sash windows retained in the existing white; or a single agreed colour scheme is adopted across the whole of the principal elevation, which would produce a better outcome for the building than the present arrangement.

7.6.5 Effect, as drawn: harm at a very low level, fully reversible. With either alternative at 7.6.4: no effect, or a minor positive effect.

7.7 Internal counter and servery fit-out (element f)

7.7.1 The fit-out is designed as freestanding and demountable joinery standing within the historic room. It involves no alteration to the plan form, no removal of historic fabric, no new partitions against historic surfaces and no openings. The counter run, display units, screens and seating are scribed to the existing floor and walls rather than fixed into them.

7.7.2 The historic features of the room are retained and, in the case of the fireplace, positively displayed: drawing 301-020 identifies the fireplace as a display element within the layout rather than backing equipment against it, carrying forward the approach agreed with the conservation officer on the 2024 application. The existing beams are retained and remain exposed, and the fielded panelling is retained in situ.

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- 7.7.3** Effect: no effect on the significance of the listed building, and a minor positive effect in so far as the fit-out reveals and displays the fireplace and returns the room to public use and view.

7.8 Setting of nearby designated heritage assets

- 7.8.1** Church of St Mary the Virgin (Grade I). The significance of the church derives overwhelmingly from its own medieval fabric, its landmark tower and spire, its churchyard and its role as the focal point of the planned town. None of these is physically affected. The relevant question is whether the proposals would harm the significance of the church as experienced through its setting, and in particular in the enclosed view at the churchyard gate.
- 7.8.2** The church has stood among the shops, inns and trading premises of Baldock since the town was founded, and a commercial frontage opposite its gate is a constituent part of its historic setting rather than an intrusion into it. The canopy, its fascia and the projecting sign face north-east onto the street and are read with the commercial frontage; they are not experienced in the approach to the church. Neither is illuminated. The one element read in the same views as the churchyard gate is the painted graphic, for the reasons given at Section 7.5.4; with the mitigation recommended there, its effect in that view is a restrained, unlit painted sign of a traditional kind on the flank of a historic commercial building.
- 7.8.3** Effect on the significance of the Church of St Mary the Virgin: no effect.
- 7.8.4** Butterfield House (Grade II*), the Tomb of William Clarkson (Grade II), and the listed buildings of the Hitchin Street group. There is no meaningful intervisibility between the application unit and Butterfield House or the Clarkson tomb, and no effect on the significance of either. The listed buildings of the Hitchin Street group, with which The George is listed for group value, share a streetscape in which active, signed commercial ground floors are the historic norm; several of those buildings carry modern shopfronts. Effect: no effect.

7.9 Baldock Conservation Area

- 7.9.1** The proposals would return an active, occupied and lit ground floor to the most prominent corner frontage in the conservation area, reversing a vacancy that presently leaves blank windows at the junction of Church Street and Hitchin Street. That is a direct contribution to the surviving commercial grain that Section 4.5.1 identifies as central to the area's character.
- 7.9.2** The scheme also removes applied clutter: the existing swing sign is taken down and replaced with a smaller one, and the letting board that currently occupies the elevation will become redundant with occupation of the unit.
- 7.9.3** The new canopy and signage are of a scale, material and tone that sit comfortably in a market-town street of mixed commercial frontages, and none of it is illuminated. Subject to the mitigation at Section 8, the character and appearance of the Baldock Conservation Area would be preserved, and in respect of the return of activity to a vacant frontage, enhanced.

7.10 Summary of effects

- 7.10.1** The table below states the effect of each element in the terms required by NPPF Policy HE5.

Element	Effect on significance	Degree and reversibility
(a) Redecoration of joinery, as drawn	Harm	Very low. Fully reversible. Reduced to no effect or minor positive if 7.6.4 is adopted.

Element	Effect on significance	Degree and reversibility
(b) Canopy	Harm	Low. Fully reversible; no loss of historic fabric.
(b) Fascia lettering	No effect	Applied to the canopy, not to the building.
(c) Painted graphic, as drawn	Harm	Low to moderate. Not reversible.
(c) Painted graphic, with shelter coat or relocation	Harm	Low. Fully reversible; no residual effect on fabric.
(d) New projecting sign	No effect	Reversible; potential minor positive through reduced clutter.
(e) Removal of existing swing sign	No effect / positive	Minor positive, subject to retention of the bracket.
(f) Internal counter and servery fit-out	No effect / positive	Minor positive; reveals and displays the fireplace.
Setting of the Church of St Mary the Virgin (Grade I)	No effect	—
Setting of other designated assets	No effect	—
Baldock Conservation Area	Positive	Character and appearance preserved and, in part, enhanced.

7.10.2 Taken cumulatively, the proposals would result in harm to the significance of the Grade II listed building at the low end of the scale, arising from the presence of applied elements on the principal elevation rather than from any loss of, or damage to, historic fabric. The proposals would not cause substantial harm, and would not result in the total loss of significance. They would have no effect on the significance of any other designated heritage asset, and a positive effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

7.10.3 That harm attracts considerable importance and weight under Policy HE6 and under the statutory duties. It is not treated in what follows as negligible.

9 Public benefits and the planning balance

9.1 Public benefits

9.1.1 The following public benefits arise from the proposals.

- Securing the long-term re-use of a vacant part of a listed building. The ground-floor unit has stood empty since the restaurant use ceased. Bringing it back into active occupation is expressly identified in NPPF Policy HE6 as an important public benefit. It is also the single most effective thing that can be done for the building: historic buildings are conserved by being used, and a maintained, occupied, heated and supervised ground floor is in a materially better position than an empty one.
- Restoring an active frontage to the principal corner of the conservation area. The proposals return activity, light and people to the frontage that closes the view from the High Street junction and forms the built edge of the churchyard approach.
- Positive heritage outcomes within the scheme. The fireplace is revealed and displayed rather than concealed; the panelling and beams are retained and protected; applied modern signage is removed and replaced with less; and a photographic record of the unit will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record.
- Support for the vitality and viability of Baldock town centre, to which NPPF Policy TC2 directs substantial weight, and to which Local Plan Policy ETC7 is directed. The proposal provides a day-to-day food shop in the town centre, within walking distance of the surrounding residential area and of the station.
- Economic and employment benefits, including the creation of jobs at the premises and the expansion of an established independent business already trading in Baldock.
- An operator with a demonstrated commitment to the town centre. The applicant already trades from premises opposite the site and is investing in a second, larger unit in the same street rather than relocating out of the centre.

9.2 The balance

- 9.2.1** Substantial weight is to be given to the conservation of the significance of the listed building, and the harm identified at Section 7.10 is a matter of considerable importance and weight. That is the starting point, and it is not displaced by the modest scale of the works.
- 9.2.2** Against that, the character of the harm should be understood accurately. No historic fabric is lost, altered, removed or damaged. No opening is changed. No historic joinery is replaced. The harm arises from the presence of applied elements on one bay of a long elevation, all of which can be taken down, and all of which are of a type — canopy, fascia, projecting sign, painted sign — that has been part of the commercial frontage of this street for as long as the street has existed. Subject to the mitigation at Section 8, the building can be returned to its present appearance at the end of the tenancy.
- 9.2.3** The benefits set out at Section 9.1 are genuinely public rather than private. The re-use of the vacant unit, the return of an active frontage at this corner, the display of the fireplace, the reduction of applied clutter and the contribution to the vitality of the town centre all accrue to the public and to the heritage asset itself.
- 9.2.4** In MCA's assessment the harm identified is clearly and convincingly justified, and is outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal. The statutory duties under sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 are properly discharged by a grant of consent subject to the conditions suggested at Section 8.

10 Conclusion

- 10.1** The George is a Grade II listed former coaching inn of considerable significance to Baldock, standing at the pivot of the historic town and forming one side of the approach to the Grade I parish church. Its significance lies in its early nineteenth-century brick front and the composition of that elevation, in the earlier fabric that survives behind it, in its historic role on the Great North Road, and in its long public use.
- 10.2** The proposals are modest, applied and — subject to the resolution of the painted graphic addressed at Section 7.5 — reversible. They remove nothing, alter no opening, replace no historic joinery and touch no historic surface internally. They retain and display the fireplace, retain the panelling and beams in situ, and reduce rather than add to the applied signage on the elevation.
- 10.3** The proposals would cause harm to the significance of the listed building at the low end of the scale, arising from the presence of the canopy and signage on the principal elevation. They would not cause substantial harm or total loss. They would have no effect on the significance of the Church of St Mary the Virgin or of any other designated heritage asset, and would preserve and in part enhance the character and appearance of the Baldock Conservation Area.
- 10.4** That harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme, foremost among them the long-term re-use of a vacant part of a listed building and the return of an active frontage to the most prominent corner of the conservation area. The proposals accord with Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 and with Chapter 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and listed building consent is respectfully sought.