

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/02874/FP

Date: 26/02/2025

Planning Officer: VW

Address: 111 Walsworth Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9SP

Subject: Replacement windows to front, side and rear elevations.

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 Currently, there is insufficient information with the application to determine the overall quality of the replacement windows and whether they would be in the applicant's words '*almost identical appearance*'. Whilst I raise no objection to the replacement of side and rear windows, there is a case to suggest that the front replacement windows may harm the character & appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area, therefore failing to satisfy the provisions of Section 72(1) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990 and may not accord with Section 16 of the Framework or Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031. The proposal is currently **OBJECTIONABLE** in heritage terms.

2.0 Context

- 2.1 No.111 Walsworth Road is unlisted but is identified as a positive building within the Hitchin Conservation Area (see extract of Map 7: Character Area 4 - Windmill Hill and Walsworth Road, below right). The building is set back from the south side of Walsworth Road, to the southwest of Walsworth Road Baptist Church and its associated Church Hall (both Buildings of Local Interest) and to the east of flats accessed via Harrison Close.



- 2.2 The Church is described in the BLI Register (26 July 2011) as:

Successor to a tin Mission Hut the Baptist Church was built in 1875 by local builder George Jeeves; it represents a key religious community in nineteenth century Hitchin and also a connection with Richard Johnson, long-time Chief Engineer of the Great Northern Railway and Hitchin resident. Provides an important corner focal point at the boundary of the Conservation Area.

whilst the hall is described as:

The Church Hall was built in 1914 and has a foundation stone laid by Richard Johnson. Stands immediately adjacent to Baptist Church (see entry).

- 2.3 The site is located south-west but outside of a designated Article 4 Direction area.

3.0 The Local Plan and NPPF (Dec 2024)

- 3.1 Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 is relevant as are the following paragraphs of the NPPF:
- **135 c)** (sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment),
 - **207** (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)
 - **210** (desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
 - **212** (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
 - **213** (clear and convincing justification), and
 - **215** (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

4.0 The Proposal

- 4.1 The following is noted in the submitted DAS (my emphasis in bold):

*The proposal is to replace the existing windows as described on the submitted drawings and window schedules. The existing (mostly sash) windows are **timber with single glazing**, but now requiring an overhaul, repair, and decoration just to make them serviceable. In addition, a substantial amount of heat is lost through the single glazing which makes the building extraordinarily expensive to heat, and there are issues with condensation internally during the winter months.*

The front bay windows were also until recently, partly covered by ivy which has damaged these frames further.

*The replacement windows are of an **almost identical appearance and would be UPVC with double glazing** as illustrated within the submitted window schedules. This would include all four windows to the front elevation, plus the three windows within the extended bay.*

A first floor window would be replaced to the side elevation over the stairs and a high level ground floor window within the modern annex extension further to the rear. A ground floor window would be replaced to the north-east elevation within the annex together with a further three ground floor windows to the rear of the annex extension.

This would ensure that the current use can be maintained with significantly reduced heating and maintenance costs.

The neighbouring Baptist Church is listed in the Hitchin Register of Buildings of Local Interest, however no buildings within the vicinity are statutory listed.

The neighbouring flats are a modern addition and set over four stories with facing brickwork and upper rendered panels to all elevations. Windows within this building are all double glazed UPVC and of a simple appearance.

- 4.2 One of the submitted documents refers to:

These PVCu vertical sliding sash windows have been designed to maintain the elegant proportions of traditional sash windows, whilst incorporating the very best of

modern-day technology. They feature tilting upper and lower sashes for ease of cleaning, low line beads and gaskets for improved sight lines, energy efficient glass to reduce heating bills.....

The same document lists some of the key features as:

- *Sculptured Georgian bars*
- *Traditional run through sash horns*
- *Both sashes slide*
- *A choice of hardware and*
- *High quality balances*

- 4.3 Whilst each case is considered on its own merits there are several appeal decisions relating to replacement windows in conservation areas. One such case is that of 9 Chudleigh Road, Exeter EX2 8TS where planning permission was refused under ref: 23/0223/FUL for the replacement of timber windows with uPVC windows. The appeal decision is dated 11 April 2024.



- 4.4 Similar to no. 9 Chudleigh Road:

- No.111 Walsworth Road is an unlisted attractive traditionally constructed two storey building and is identified as a building which makes a positive contribution to the character of the area.
- The proposal seeks to replace the existing timber windows with uPVC alternatives.
- Whilst there are still many traditional timber windows in the vicinity, a number of properties have had replacement windows and that incremental changes made to unlisted buildings are a threat that is resulting in the erosion of the area's character.
- That individual detailing of the windows, alongside the natural and traditional characteristics of the timber material are positive features that reflect the time period of the building's construction, and are thus important components of its overall historic character, contributes positively to the CA. In contrast, the proposed uPVC windows would be of a modern synthetic manufactured material and finish, which would lack the finesse and traditional characteristics of the existing windows.
- The windows to the rear are not visible from public vantage points.

- 4.5 Unlike 9 Chudleigh, no.11 Walsworth Road is set further back but arguably its windows are of greater visual and architectural interest when compared with the Exeter case. The Inspector took the view that the replacement windows to the prominent roadside elevation of No.9 would unacceptably contrast with its

existing authenticity. They would therefore result in harm to the character, appearance and heritage attributes of No. 9 and that of the wider CA. Whilst aware of a number of examples of uPVC replacement windows in the immediate area and elsewhere, the Inspector took the view that those cases do not lend any particular merit in support of the proposals.

- 4.6 **There is insufficient detail with the application i.e. applied or through glazing bars and their profile, comparison of sash horn features etc. to make an appropriate judgement.** Consequently, I find that the replacement front windows would conflict with Policy HE1 of the NHLP and Section 16 of the Framework, which amongst other matters seek to ensure that development promotes local distinctiveness, contributes positively to the visual richness of the townscape and preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the HCA.
- 4.7 It is disappointing to see the proposed loss of original timber, sliding sash windows and had this been a listed building I would have no hesitation in recommending the refusal of listed building consent. However, this is not the case, and the building is not covered by the neighbouring Article 4 Direction either. Having said that, there is a case for seeking appropriately detailed slimline timber double-glazed windows to the front elevation with through glazing bars to ensure that the front elevation continues to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the HCA. However, I am mindful that with respect to 99 Walsworth (a building in the HCA and Article 4 Direction area) I supported appn ref: 21/01515/FPH relating to *'Replacement of unauthorised UPVC windows on front elevation with Upvc vertically sliding sash windows incorporating 18mm glazing. Replace solid timber front door with composite door. New felt roof and replacement timber-effect fascia to bay. Replace existing front dormer window with no.2 roof lights. Remove existing render and re-render. Take down and re-erect front boundary wall. (Details as amended by updated application form, drawing no. 2021/01 Rev C received on 25/10/2021, drawing entitled 'Bygone Symphony 2019 Cross Sections' received on 21/10/2021 and drawing entitled Bygone Symphony received on 14/10/2021)'.*
- 4.8 If you are minded approving this application then apart from the standard time condition, you may wish to consider imposing the following condition that ensures that the front windows at least remain vertically sliding sashes (see below):

- 1. Replacement windows W1, W2, W3, W4, W6 and W7 on the front elevation as indicated on approved drawing no. L-03 shall be vertically sliding sashes unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.**

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to the character and appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area under Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer