

Planning, Design and Heritage Statement

Change of External Appearance
3–4 Portmill Lane, Hitchin

1. Introduction

This Planning, Design and Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for changes to the external appearance of the building at 3–4 Portmill Lane, Hitchin. The application seeks consent for the installation of new windows and minor external amendments to the appearance of the building to facilitate the approved residential use of the upper floors.

The site has been subject to Prior Approval applications for the change of use of the first and second floors to residential accommodation under references 25/02744/PNMA and 25/02745/PNMA. This application does not seek to revisit the principle of residential use, which has already been accepted, but instead relates to the external alterations necessary to implement that development.

2. Site and Surroundings

The site comprises an existing building on Portmill Lane, located within the urban area of Hitchin. The surrounding area is characterised by a mix of commercial and residential uses, with buildings of varying age, scale and architectural style. The site lies within the Hitchin Conservation Area, though the immediate context includes a number of later 20th-century buildings and alterations.



Aerial view from south.



North elevation

3. Planning History

Prior Approval has been granted for the conversion of the first and second floors to residential use under applications 25/02744/PNMA and 25/02745/PNMA. These approvals establish the acceptability of the residential use. The current application relates solely to changes to the external appearance of the building, which fall outside the scope of the prior approval process and therefore require planning permission.

4. Proposed Development

The proposal comprises:

- The installation of new windows to serve the approved residential accommodation; and
- Minor amendments to the existing external appearance, including a new ramp to the existing entrance and canopy to provide a possible second entrance at ground floor and to facilitate the possible sub-division of the ground floor.

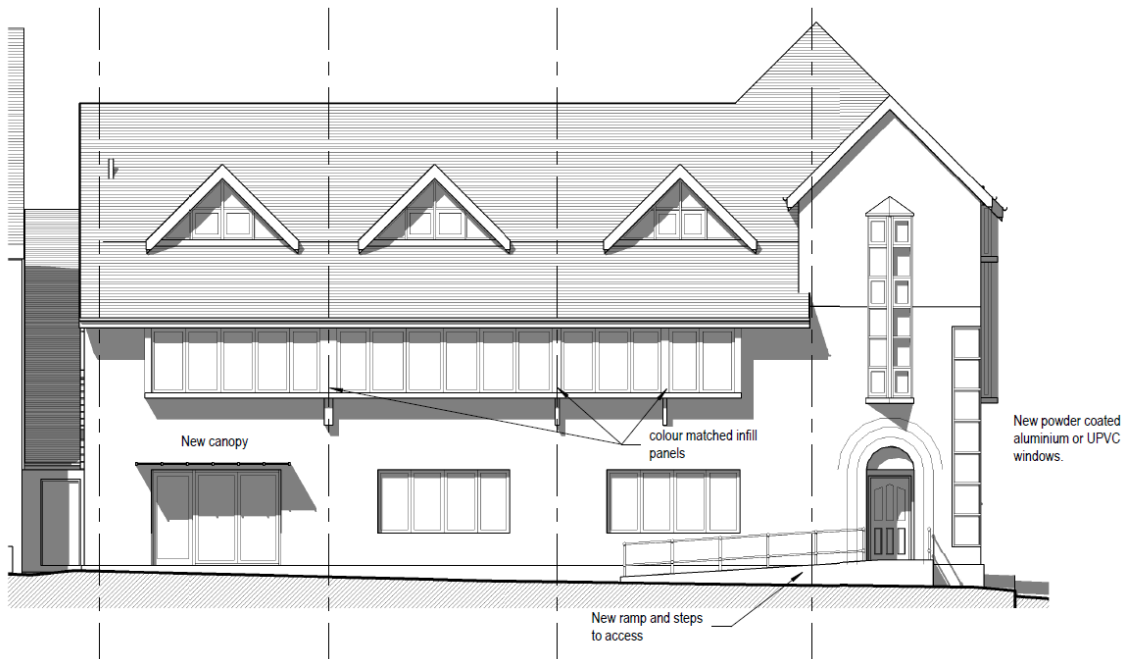
All works are confined to the existing building envelope. No extensions, increases in height, or changes to the footprint are proposed.

5. Design Approach

The design approach seeks to balance the functional requirements of the approved residential use with a sensitive response to the existing building and its setting. The proposed fenestration has been designed to:

- Provide appropriate levels of daylight, outlook and ventilation for future occupiers;
- Reflect the proportions and rhythm of the existing elevations; and
- Achieve a coherent and balanced appearance within the street scene.

The proposals are modest in scale and avoid unnecessary or visually dominant alterations



Proposed South Elevation

6. Impact on the Street Scene and Amenity

The proposed changes will not result in harm to the character or appearance of the area or conservation area. The varied architectural context along Portmill Lane, including modern and altered buildings, provides a setting in which the revised fenestration will sit comfortably.

The proposals will not lead to unacceptable overlooking, loss of privacy or harm to neighbouring amenity. The changes are consistent with typical residential fenestration in an urban environment.

7. Heritage Considerations

Conservation Area Context

The site is located within the Hitchin Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset. The significance of the Conservation Area, as identified in the Hitchin Conservation Area Appraisal, derives primarily from its historic street pattern, medieval core, traditional plot divisions, and the prevalence of historic buildings dating from the medieval and post-medieval periods.

The application building was constructed in the 1980s and is not a listed building, nor is it identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the historic character or significance of the area. It is a modern intervention within the Conservation Area and does not contain historic fabric of heritage value.

Impact of the Proposals

The proposals are limited to minor alterations to fenestration and do not involve changes to the building's scale, massing, roof form or overall footprint. No demolition or loss of historic fabric will occur.

The design of the new and amended windows has been carefully considered to ensure that they remain subordinate to the host building and do not introduce incongruous materials or detailing. The proposals will result in a more ordered and coherent elevation, which aligns with the general principles for managing change within the Conservation Area as set out in the Appraisal.

In accordance with Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and paragraphs 199–202 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposals have been assessed for their impact on the significance of the Conservation Area. Given the limited scope of works and the non-significant nature of the host building, the development would result in no harm to the significance, character or appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area.

The statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the Conservation Area is therefore satisfied.

8. Biodiversity and Environmental Considerations

The development involves external alterations only and does not result in land take, habitat loss or ecological impact. The proposal falls within the de minimis exemption to mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements, and a Biodiversity Gain Plan is not required.

9. Planning Policy Considerations

The proposal aligns with National and Local Planning Policy objectives by:

- Supporting the effective reuse of existing buildings;
- Facilitating residential development in a sustainable town centre location; and
- Delivering a high standard of design that responds appropriately to its context, including the Conservation Area.

10. Conclusion

This application seeks planning permission for modest and carefully considered changes to the external appearance of 3–4 Portmill Lane to enable the implementation of the approved residential use of the upper floors. The proposals respect the character of the existing building, preserve the character and appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area, and do not result in harm to neighbouring amenity. The development is policy compliant and planning permission is respectfully sought.

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