



**Pease House, The Priory, Tilehouse Street,
Hitchin**

Conservation Area Statement

On behalf of **Metric + Maker Limited**

Project Ref: 333102790/A5 | Date: 20 October 2025

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Conservation Area Statement has been prepared by Stantec UK Ltd in support of a Prior Approval Application (“the Application”) submitted by Metric + Maker Limited (“the Applicant”), for a proposed change of use from an existing office to residential use at Pease House at the Priory, Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, SG5 2DW (“the Application Site”).
- 1.2 The Site falls within North Hertfordshire District Council (“NHDC”) who are the Local Planning Authority (“LPA”).
- 1.3 A change of use is sought from Class E (Commercial, Business and Services) to Class C3 (Dwellinghouses) under Class MA of Part 3, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (“the Order”).
- 1.4 The description of development is as follows:

Prior approval for change of use from Commercial, Business and Service (Use Class E) to 27 Dwellinghouses (Use Class C3) under Class MA of Part 3, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).

- 1.5 Full details of how the Prior Approval Application addresses any potential impacts are set out in the accompanying covering letter. This report addresses the requirements of Part MA.2(1)e) of Class MA of the Order to assess the impact of the change of use of Pease House on the character or sustainability of the Hitchin Conservation Area.

2 Application site and surrounding area

A. APPLICATION SITE

- 2.1 The Application Site is defined by the red line boundary shown in **Figure 2.1** below and the site location plan included at **Appendix 1**.

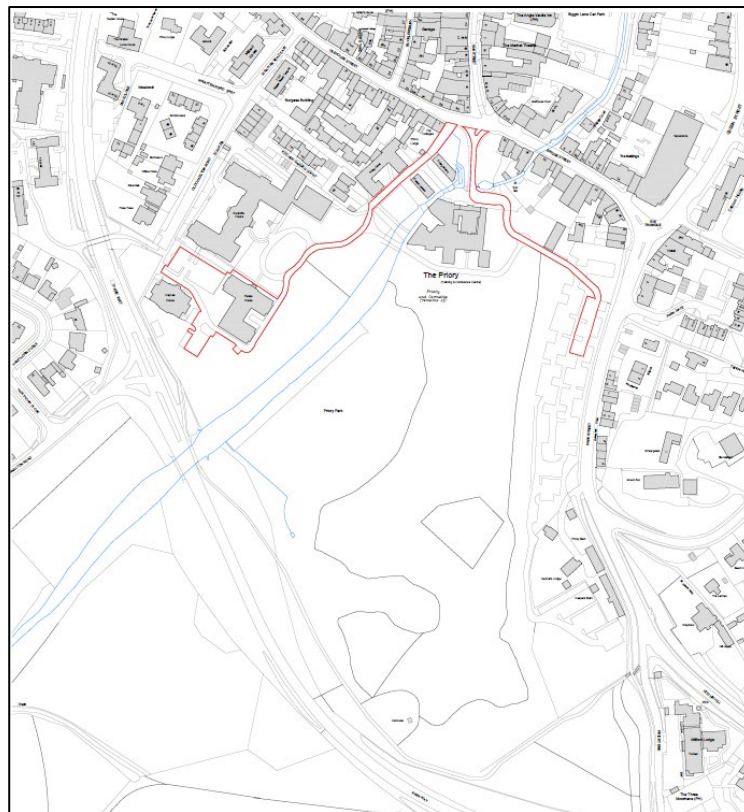


Figure 2.1: Site boundary plan

- 2.2 The Application Site comprises of Pease House, which is a modern three storey office building located towards the southern edge of Hitchin town centre. The Application Site is located on Old Charlton Road and accessed via Tilehouse Street. Pease House forms part of a collection of three offices buildings, including Radcliffe House and Keynes House, plus several ancillary buildings.
- 2.3 Pease House was built in the 1990s and situated within 19 acres of parkland at Hitchin Priory. The existing building is located in the southern section of the wider site with grade car parking courts located immediately to the west and south. Mature woodland is situated to the south and east of the existing building.

B. HERITAGE ASSETS

- 2.4 Pease House is situated within the designated Hitchin Conservation Area and is located within Area 7: Priory Park and Hitchin Hill of the Hitchin Character Area Statement (July 2011). It is not a statutory or locally listed building; however, it is near to statutory listed buildings: the Coach House (Grade II), the Garden Bridge (Grade II), the Stables (Grade II) and The Priory (Grade I). The location of these is illustrated in **Figure 2.2** below.

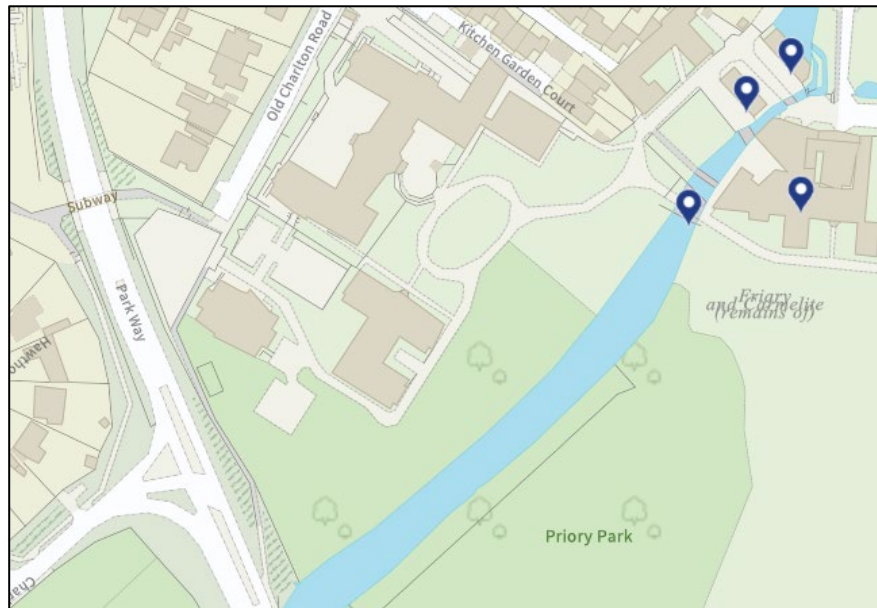


Figure 2.2: Extract from Historic England map indicating nearby heritage assets

- 2.5 Map 10 of the Hitchin Character Area Statement that defines Area 7 (see **Figure 2.3 and Appendix 2**) identifies an important boundary wall in front of Radcliffe House to the north, which will remain in situ and unaltered. The wall includes a significant amount of 'rat trap' bond (brick on edge) brickwork and makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.
- 2.6 Map 10 also identifies a boundary to the Parkland of the Priory Conference Centre, reflecting its much-reduced setting over time of the former Hitchin Priory. Pease House is not located within this boundary.
- 2.7 The open space to the north of Pease House is defined on Map 10 as important open space which will remain as is, and no important tree groups will be affected.
- 2.8 Important views (numbers 9 and 10) are identified on Map 10, with view 9 over the lake formed by the River Hiz; and view 10 looking across the open space in front of Radcliffe House towards the north along the former Malt Mill Lane into the town centre, with St Mary's Church spire on the horizon and road entrance from Tilehouse Street. There are no external changes proposed

to the existing property by the Prior Approval Application and therefore the view is not affected by the scheme.

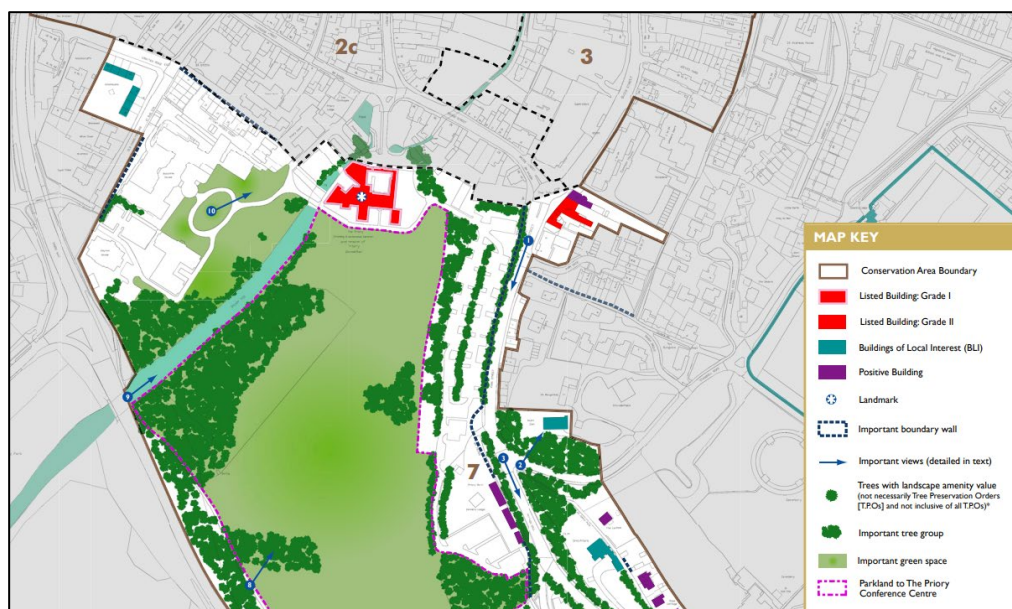


Figure 2.3: Extract from Map 10: Character Area 7 - Priory Park and Hitchin Hill

- 2.9 The listed buildings located nearby, including the highly important and significant setting of the Grade I Priory Hotel, are not considered to be impacted by the proximity of Pease House. The Priory was statutorily listed in 1951 and would have likely been required to be considered in the planning permission to permit the construction of Pease House. The existing building is not therefore considered to impact the setting or character of The Priory Hotel.
- 2.10 The modern office buildings of Radcliffe House, Pease House and Keynes House are not mentioned in the Conservation Area Appraisal and are therefore considered to be neutral buildings within the context of the conservation area.
- 2.11 The Prior Approval Application proposes only internal modifications to Pease House and therefore does not affect the defined character of the Conservation Area, its important features including the open spaces, groups of trees and existing boundary wall. The change of use from office to residential use, will not materially alter the character of Pease House and its contribution to the character of the location and is likely to reduce the number of people accessing the location. The re-use of this existing building is a sustainable re-purposing of this highly sustainable location.

3 Legislative and policy context

3.1 This section of the Statement summarises the Development Plan Documents and material considerations relevant to the Development.

A. THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3.2 The development plan comprises the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (November 2022) ("the Local Plan"). The following Local Plan policies are relevant to the heritage related considerations contained in this Statement.

- Policy SP9: Design and sustainability
- Policy D1: Sustainable design
- Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets

3.3 The Council adopted the Hitchin Conservation Area Character Area Statement in July 2011 which is a material consideration for new development proposals in the district. The Application Site falls within Area 7: Priory Park and Hitchin Hill.

B. NATIONAL POLICY AND GUIDANCE

3.4 The National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") was published in 2012. National Planning Practice Guidance ("PPG") was subsequently introduced in 2014. The latest version of the NPPF was published in December 2024, then minor updates were made in February 2025. The NPPF sets out the Government's approach to planning matters. Paragraphs 202, 203, 207, 208, 210, 213, and 221 are concerned with conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

3.5 Paragraph 210 of the NPPF (2024) states that local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

3.6 Paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's

conservation (the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

- 3.7 The Historic England (2019) 'Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management' provides guidance to assess the contribution of a building to the character and appearance of the conservation area, based on the criteria set out in the Historic England guidance Table 1¹.
- 3.8 Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (2nd edition) from Historic England emphasises the importance of assessing how the setting of heritage assets is affected by developments, such as how views of the heritage asset are impacted.

C. STATUTORY DUTY

- 3.9 Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area. Case law has also established that "preserve" means "to do no harm".
- 3.10 In accordance with the NPPF, Local Plan policies and Historic England guidance, this Conservation Area Assessment examines how the Prior Approval change of use proposals for internal changes to Pease House impacts the character of Area 7 of the Hitchin Conservation Area. The internal changes proposed are not considered to impact the setting of nearby listed buildings.

¹ Historic England (2019) 'Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management'

4 Assessment

- 4.1 Pease House is not a statutorily listed building and is not located in the curtilage of the nearby listed buildings, which are limited to their immediate setting and boundary wall extending around the grounds to the south of the Hitchin Priory to the east of the River Hiz. The Prior Approval Application therefore complies with Part MA.1(d) of Class MA of Part 3, Schedule 2 of the Order.
- 4.2 Section 1 above describes the conservation area character relevant to the context of Pease House, with its prevailing features being the open space and important trees, the wider parkland setting and Views 9 and 10 across over the lake formed by the River Hiz and towards the town centre and the St Mary's Spire.
- 4.3 It also identifies the proximity of several listed buildings as shown on the Area 7 Map 10 of the NHDC's Character Area Appraisal attached at Appendix 2. The listed buildings within close proximity to the application site include: the Coach House, the Garden Bridge, the Stables and The Priory. The setting of the highly important Grade I Priory Hotel is not considered to be impacted by the Prior Approval application and with the truncation of the former Monastery's context over the centuries, Pease House is not considered to be within the setting of the Priory Hotel.
- 4.4 No objections were raised on heritage grounds to the previous Prior Approval for Radcliffe House (ref. 24/01669/PNMA) which was granted in October 2024. The Officer's Report stated:

"The building falls within the Hitchin Conservation area. There are listed buildings in Tilehouse Street to the north and northeast but none adjoining or adjacent to Radcliffe House.

The application is supported by a Conservation Area statement. It concludes that the Prior Approval application proposes only internal modifications to Radcliffe House and therefore does not affect the defined character of the conservation area, its important features including the open spaces, groups of trees and existing boundary wall. The change of use from office to residential use, will not materially alter the character of Radcliffe House and its contribution to the character of the location and is likely to reduce the number of people accessing the location. The re-use of this existing building is a sustainable re-purposing of this highly sustainable location.

The proposals do not result in any harm to heritage assets and therefore no public benefits are needed to be considered to outweigh any harms identified. The application therefore addresses the legislative requirements of a Prior Approval application."

- 4.5 Given that Pease House is set further away from the designated heritage assets and heavily screened by an intervening area of woodland, the setting of the Priory and other nearby listed buildings are not considered to be affected by the proposals for Pease House, and it is not considered that Pease House is within the setting of the Hitchin Priory. Its former grand parkland setting has long been truncated by the construction of Parkway and the defining of its setting to the east of the River Hiz, narrowing its curtilage and setting to an immediate parkland setting. The construction of the group of office buildings including Pease House in the 1990s to the west of the River Hiz has also narrowed the context for appreciating the Priory Hotel.
- 4.6 The internal changes proposed do not change the relationship and context of Pease House or its relationship to wider parkland and the Grade I listed Priory Hotel.
- 4.7 An assessment of the contribution of Pease House to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, based on the criteria set out in the Historic England guidance Table 1², is provided below in **Table 4.1**.

TABLE 4.1: ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTION OF PEASE HOUSE TO THE HITCHIN CONSERVATION AREA	
Criteria	Commentary
Is the work of a particular architect or designer of regional or local note?	No
Does it have landmark quality?	Pease House is a modern three storey red brick-built office building constructed in the 1990s. It is of a quality that respects the parkland context and proximity to The Priory Hotel.
Does it reflect a substantial number of other elements in the conservation area in age, style, materials, form or other characteristics?	The building is late 20 th Century and modern in character. It respects the historic parkland context.
Does it relate to adjacent designated heritage assets in age, materials or in any other historically significant way?	It reflects its immediate parkland context cognisant of its relationship to The Priory Hotel.
Does it contribute positively to the setting of adjacent heritage assets?	The building was permitted in full knowledge and assessment of the site's relationship to the nearby Grade I listed Priory Hotel.

² Historic England (2019) 'Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management'

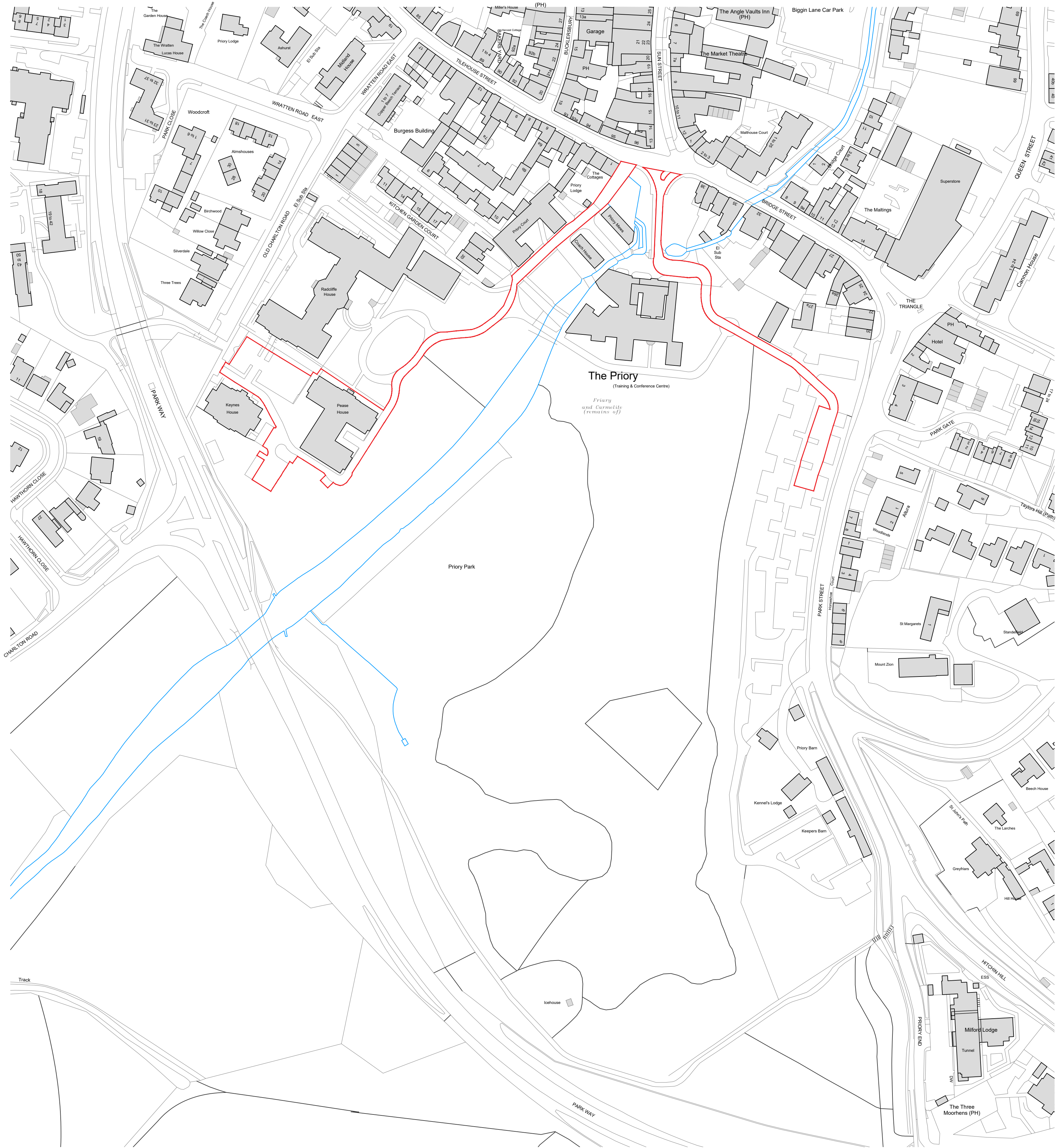
Does it contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces including exteriors or open spaces within a complex of public buildings?	Yes. It is a high-quality modern office building with attractive design features. It was permitted in the knowledge of the important open spaces adjacent to it and the setting of the Priory Hotel.
Is it associated with a designated landscape e.g. a significant wall, terracing or garden building?	Partly. The Application Site is set within open green space and adjacent to important trees and parkland, but this is not known to have been designed by a significant landscape architect. An important boundary wall is identified adjacent to Old Charlton Road that is unaffected by the proposal. Some of the existing tree groups are considered not to be well managed in the NHDC's Conservation Area appraisal (p.46).
Does it individually, or as part of a group, illustrate the development of the settlement in which it stands?	It reflects the modern-day growth and progression of the Priory grounds to accommodate the economic growth and needs of the town centre.
Does it have significantly historic association with features such as the historic road layout, burgage plots, a town park or a landscape feature?	Not particularly but it reflects the reduction of the Priory parkland context that has occurred over the centuries.
Does it have historic associations with local people or past events?	Pease House itself is not known to have any specific connections with historic associations with local people or past events. Radcliffe House is named after the Radcliffe family, former owners of the Priory who rebuilt the main house in 1775, retaining some of the 15 th Century cloisters.
Does it reflect the traditional functional character of former uses in the area?	No
Does its use contribute to the character or appearance of the area?	No

- 4.8 The NPPF and heritage legislation requires great weight to be given to any harm arising to the significance and character of heritage assets. No harm is identified by the proposed conversion of Pease House a modern office building, to residential use. No external alterations are proposed and all features considered important to the character of Area 7 of the Hitchin Conservation Area are not affected.

5 Summary and conclusions

- 5.1 No external alterations are proposed as part of the submitted Prior Approval Application to change the use of Pease House from office to residential use. The building is not considered to be within the much-truncated setting of The Priory Hotel. As such, the proposals will not cause any harm to nearby listed buildings.
- 5.2 The character of the Conservation Area is defined in relation to the importance of The Priory Hotel and its parkland setting, including grouping of trees, the River Hiz, the open spaces and none of these characteristics are harmed by the change of use of Pease House to residential use. The building's occupancy for office workers is likely to be higher than as use for apartments. Future occupants will be able to enjoy the existing open spaces adjacent to Pease House. The important boundary wall on Old Charlton Road will remain as is with no proposed alterations.
- 5.3 The Prior Approval Application will therefore have no effect on the character or appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area and more particularly Area 7: Priory Park and Hitchin Hill. Both the use and the internal changes will not affect the character of the location and its open parkland characteristic. There are no heritage harms identified by the Prior Approval Application and therefore no public benefits are needed to be considered to outweigh any harms identified.
- 5.4 The application therefore addresses the legislative requirements of Part MA.2(1)e) of Class MA of Part 3, Schedule 2 of the Order, relevant Local Plan policies, chapter 16 of the NPPF and Historic England's heritage guidance.

Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan



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Drawing Status
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Appendix 2 – Map 10 Area 7: Priory Park and Hitchin Hill Character Area Statement (July 2011)

