

Heritage Statement for Upton House, Baldock Street, Royston, SG8 5AY



1. Introduction and Brief

This Heritage Statement supports a Listed Building Consent application for internal alterations including basement at Upton House to provide additional office accommodation within the existing basement, and installation of a new internal staircase to link the basement with the ground floor. The works are proposed to ensure the building's continued viable use, while respecting and conserving its significance.

Address: Upton House, Baldock Street, Royston, Hertfordshire, SG8 5AY.

Proposal: Conversion of basement level into additional offices (ancillary to existing office use) + new internal staircase access.

2. Listing / Heritage Status

- The building is a “*Grade II listed period property*”.
- The property is located within a conservation/heritage context in Royston. Given that the building is listed, any works affecting its historic fabric require consent under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

3. Significance and Heritage Value

a) Architectural / Historic Interest

- The building is a “period property... high ceilings, imposing windows, and beautiful period architraves, skirtings and coving”.
- Being listed, the building retains special architectural or historic interest. Typical features of significance may include: original structural fabric (walls, floors, ceilings), period joinery and mouldings, sash windows, historic staircase, and basement/servant-level spaces which reflect the original use and hierarchy of spaces.
- The town-centre location contributes to its historic setting within Royston (a historic market town).

b) Setting and Group Value

- Upton House sits on Baldock Street, Royston's historic thoroughfare, and contributes to the character of the conservation area / historic core. Alterations should therefore respect both the internal fabric and its relationship to the surrounding historic environment.
- The basement level and circulation (including staircases) are part of the spatial hierarchy and use-pattern of the historic building. They contribute to the way the building has been used and experienced over time.

c) Significance Summary

In summary, the building's significance lies in:

- Its historic form, fabric and detailing from a past period (including basement, ground floor, and period joinery).
- The survival of original features (sash windows, architraves, covings) which contribute to its character.
- Its historic use as a substantial building in the heart of Royston, and its contribution to the town-centre heritage setting.
- The basement and circulation features contribute to the building's plan form and reading of historic hierarchy.

4. Proposed Works & Impact Assessment

a) Description of the Works

- Formation of additional offices within the existing basement: adapting the basement space for modern use as office accommodation, ancillary to use above.
- Installation of a new internal staircase connecting the basement with the ground floor: providing improved access and circulation, likely involving removal or adaptation of part of the basement/ground floor floorplate and insertion of a new stairwell.
- All works to respect the character of the listed building, use materials and details appropriate and minimise intervention to historic fabric.

b) Potential Impacts on Special Character

Positive Impacts:

- The continued use of the building for offices supports its maintenance and viability, helping safeguard its longer-term future and ensuring that historic fabric remains in productive use.
- Improved circulation and access may reduce pressure for invasive alterations elsewhere and support flexible use, reducing risk of harmful ad-hoc interventions.
- If carried out sensitively, adapting the basement may reduce the need for external extensions and thus preserve the external appearance and setting of the building.

Potential Risks / Negative Impacts:

- Installing a new staircase may require removal or alteration of historic floor structure, ceilings, walls or joinery in the basement or ground floor, thereby disturbing or removing historic fabric or spatial relationships.
- The introduction of modern office fit-out (partitioning, lighting, services, HVAC) in the basement is minimised so not to degrade the character of the original basement spaces if not handled carefully (e.g., by undermining original finishes, vaulting, or fabric). Rooms with interest are to remain with no alterations.

- The basement may have features of historic interest (e.g., original service stair, vaulting, historic floor surface) limited removal or obstruction would reduce the building's heritage value.
- The basement has limited visibility, but changes may affect the way the building is read internally (i.e., circulation routes and hierarchy) and thus impact understanding of the building's historic use.
- New stair may impact the ground-floor plan, possibly interfering with period joinery, skirtings, mouldings or original floor boards.
- Additional services (lighting, cabling, ventilation) in the basement risk damage to historic finishes or require intrusive chases.

c) Significance of the Impact

- The installation of the staircase has a **medium heritage impact** if it involves removal of historic fabric; however, if internal design is minimal, reversible and carefully located, the impact can be **low**.
- The basement conversion, if it retains the character of the space (by exposing historic surfaces, using reversible partitions, avoiding major structural alterations) is likely to generate a **low to medium impact** on significance.
- If works are poorly designed, there is a risk of **substantial negative impact** through loss of historic fabric, alteration of plan form, and degradation of basement character.

5. Mitigation / Design and Conservation Approach

To ensure the works are acceptable in heritage terms, the following measures are recommended:

- **Staircase design:** Locate the new stair in a part of the building where historic fabric is least vulnerable (e.g., modern or secondary partition rather than original walls). Design the stair so that it is reversible (i.e., minimal fixings into historic fabric, modifiable in the future).
- **Floor and ceiling works:** Avoid removal of original floorboards, joists or ceiling plaster unless necessary. Where removal is needed, record the fabric, salvage key elements, and reinstate or replicate as appropriate.
- **Basement space retention:** Retain the basement's character: expose or reveal historic surfaces, avoid full modern linings which obscure original fabric, use partitions which are freestanding or reversible, maintain original window/vent openings, lighting that is sympathetic, and services routed to minimise intervention.
- **Services routing:** Use existing service routes where possible; avoid chasing walls or ceilings in historic fabric, route cabling and ventilation discreetly, and leave future-reversal options. Might require tanking.
- **Materials and finishes:** Use materials sympathetic to the building's age and character. New elements should be clearly discernible as contemporary but complementary in tone and quality.

- **Documentation and recording:** Prior to any site works, carry out a detailed photographic and measured survey of the basement and staircase location, including any historic features to be removed or altered. Provide schedule of works for the LBC application showing extent of intervention.
- **Reversibility and minimal intervention:** The design should follow the principle of minimal intervention and reversibility, so that future removal of new elements would reinstate the legibility of the historic plan.
- **Consultation with Heritage Advisor:** Engage early with the local planning authority (North Hertfordshire District Council) and their heritage officer to verify acceptable level of intervention, and possibly for a condition requiring submission of detailed stair design and basement fit-out prior to commencement.

6. Summary and Conclusion

The proposed works—to convert the basement into additional office accommodation and install a new internal staircase—offer the means for continued viable use of this listed building, which is beneficial for its long-term conservation. The building’s heritage significance lies in its period architecture, historic internal fabric, and its town-centre setting. The office use changes are minimal compared to the original planning approval for air bnb’s.

If carefully designed and managed, the impact on the building’s special architectural and historic interest can be kept low-to-moderate. The key is to apply a heritage-sensitive approach: minimise loss of original fabric, ensure reversibility, retain the character of the basement, and situate the new staircase in the least harmful location. With appropriate mitigation, the proposed works are acceptable in heritage terms and should support the ongoing use and preservation of the building.