

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	25/01980/FP
CASE OFFICER:	MT
APPLICATION SITE:	Gosmore End House, Hitchin Road, Gosmore, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 7QH
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Erection of two self-build detached 3-bed dwellings including open carports, cycle stores, garden stores; bin storage and landscaping.

RECOMMENDATION:

I raise an **OBJECTION** for the following reason.

The application site formed part of the grounds to the original Gosmore House (demolished late C19) and now reads as part of the substantial grounds to Iris Court Care Home which is described as a significant green space in the GCACS. The proposed development would be the first built form experienced on the west side of Hitchin Road when entering the GCA from the north and would sit directly opposite the current Gosmore House (grade II). Introducing this amount of built form across the site with only a narrow space between the dwellings, will have an erosive urbanising impact upon the perception of openness behind the close board boundary fence. The scheme will have a small yet adverse transforming quality that will fail to satisfy the provisions of Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on listed building's special character and the character and appearance of Gosmore Conservation Area

The proposal will have some impact upon the setting of Gosmore House and harm the character and the appearance of the GCA.

SITE CONTEXT:

Gosmore End House is unlisted but is located in the Gosmore Conservation Area. Directly opposite the application site is Gosmore House (grade II). This building and the area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF. The building is described in the link below.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1295446?section=official-list-entry>

On page 7 of the submitted Heritage Statement [hereafter referred to as HS] it mentions that Gosmore Conservation Areas was designated by North Hertfordshire [District] Council in 1970 and yet on page 1 it says that 'Part of Gosmore village was first designated as a Conservation Area during the 1980's'.

The Gosmore Conservation Area Character Statement [hereafter referred to as GCACS] only refers at 1.1.2 to the original designation in 1970. It is to the GCACS that I now turn, highlighting the following extracts.

2.1.11 Elsewhere, there are wide grass verges along the west side of High Street, although these are perhaps better thought of as part of the village green, despite a hedge separating it from the street. The side of the village green that runs up to Maydencroft Lane is separated from it by a line of trees and other planting while the grounds of Gosmore Care Home have a hedge boundary to Hitchin Road. Mill Lane is edged with trees and other planting, where house driveways do not open onto it. There are no pavements within the Conservation Area.

2.1.14 The grounds of Gosmore Care Home are another 'green space' but are not publicly accessible and can only really be observed from along Hitchin Lane. There is significant tree planting within the grounds, as well as along Mill Lane (the rear of the Gosmore House property), at the rear of Letterbox Row, and south of Maydencroft Lane and generally a good spread of trees through the Conservation Area. There is a tree-lined avenue extending eastwards from Avenue Farm House towards Waterdell Lane. The part of it west of Preston Road is within the Conservation area while the part to the east is outside it.

2.2 Statement of Special Interest

2.2.1 Gosmore Conservation Area is centred on Hitchin Road and Maydencroft Road, and two significant green spaces are located between them, the village green and the grounds of Gosmore Care Home. Through the village, there are a number of prominent red brick buildings, showing a variety of styles, but of similar date and with occasionally similar architectural detailing. These are interspersed with large timber-framed buildings, from an agricultural barn to the large residential building, Gosmore House. Later buildings complement this character.



DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

I draw attention to the following extracts from the submitted HS.

*“there will be **little noticeable impact** following the development proposed to be constructed in this space” (page 1)*

"on a **secluded plot** to the North of the new modern Care Home and clear form any listed properties" (page 1)

"The proposal will **enhance** the Conservation Area" (page 2)

"site is located **next to the large grounds** and is accessed through the shared neighbouring Care Home driveway" (page 2)

"The **minor degree** to which the proposal affects the visibility in which heritage asset is appreciated, and because of its **discrete position** set back off the new Care Home driveway, there is a negligible impact on the wider village or Conservation Area." (page 3)

"The proposed development is **discreetly located** within the wider designated space in the Conservation Area" (page 4)

"The proposed site formed part of the grounds first seen in on a map in 1881" (page 6)

"The understating of the village as a **single layered settlement** with some infill development is an important and defining characteristic of Gosmore village" (page 8)

"The contribution of trees, hedges and green spaces to the appearance within the street is **significant**." (page 10)

"Only immediately at the Care Home driveway entrance (very briefly) does the view open towards the space to the South, where it is possible to view the attractive existing newer buildings beyond the application site" (page 10)

"Similarly, from the North end of the Conservation Area, the only view on the West side of Hitchin Road, is that from which the approach to the shared entrance (of Gosmore End House & Iris Court & the application site) is made, apart from Birch Cottage, **little realisation of any other building** viewed from here." (page 11)

"When viewed from the street, (Hitchin Road), the **plot in its current form makes no contribution to either the street scene, or the character and appearance of the Conservation Area**. There is no historic or architectural value, such that it was not even worthy to receive mention in the Conservation Area Appraisal." (page 13)

"... the site's inclusion in the Conservation Area is thus considered **tenuous**. Consequently, whilst the site does not constitute any positive contribution to the heritage aspect, it is arguable that its current condition actually **detracts from the adjoining settings**." (page 14)

"The two new dwellings will **add to the natural character of the land**, being very well proportioned" (page 16)

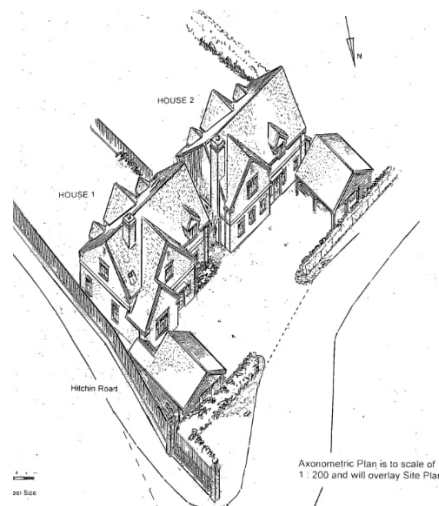
Even though the GCACS recognises the grounds of Iris Court Care Home as being a significant green space it is acknowledged that the application site is not particularly well maintained contributing to the applicant's case that its current condition 'detracts from the adjoining settings' but this is surely of the applicant's own making? Conversely, the submitted HS recognises that the contribution of trees, hedges and green spaces to the appearance within the street is 'significant' within the GCA.



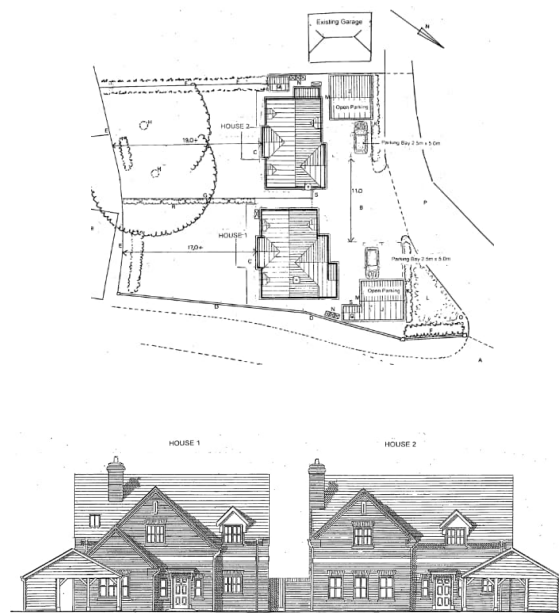
The formal appearance of the site entrance is such that it reads as an entrance to a substantial site i.e. a prestigious property such as a country house (which I appreciate that Gosmore End House and the care home are not). Other than the closeboard boundary fencing screening the condition of the site behind, the perception is that this is not a secluded site and that the perception of this site remains generally positive.



Contrary to the view offered at page 13 of the HS that the plot makes no contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, it is the lack of built form here that, in my opinion, contributes positively to the perception that the application site forms part of the landscape grounds to Gosmore End House or Iris Court Care Home. Next, the site is not considered to be 'secluded' or the proposed dwellings 'discreetly' positioned. Quite the contrary, the axonometric submitted indicates the impact of the development, particularly the easternmost dwelling, on the streetscene and character of the area. The impact would potentially be greater when the trees are not in leaf.



In fact, the cumulative impact of both dwellings here with little space afforded between them and when also taking into account the covered parking spaces, means that the transformation of the area resulting from built form would be significant on this west side of Hitchin Road and directly opposite Gosmore House (grade II listed).



Considering the amount of development across the site including covered (yet open) parking bays sitting forward of the building, the scheme represents a compact built form. Unlike the applicant's view, in considering a Section 72 case, I am unconvinced that the proposal will enhance the character or appearance of the GCA and the open, generally verdant character of the site would not be preserved either.

If the site is to be developed and perhaps taking the stance of creating a gatelodge type building, I encourage a single dwelling solution. Whilst none of the following images convey a gatelodge aesthetic they do contribute positively to the character and appearance of the GCA.



A far better solution in my opinion and one which would have the potential to improve the overall character and appearance of the GCA, would be to:

- I. Remove the closeboard fencing onto the road edge; and
- II. Introduce a well-detailed, single dwelling facing towards the road with perhaps a rear gable section and with a double garage set back against the west boundary close to a building of similar size on the adjacent land.



HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:
Sections 66(1) & 72(1)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:
Policy HE1

NPPF (December 2024):

The following paragraphs are relevant:

- **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*).

CONCLUSION:

I am not necessarily opposed to development on this site. I simply not convinced that the scheme would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the GCA, therefore, in heritage terms the scheme is considered unacceptable for the reason set out above. However, I acknowledge that there may be other sound planning reasons to grant planning permission.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 28/11/2025