

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/02673/FP & 24/02674/LBC

Date: 21/02/2025

Planning Officer: TR

Address: The Bothy, Hexton, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 3JG

Subject: See below.

- **24/02673/FP** - *Change of use and conversion of existing outbuilding to one self-contained 1-bed dwelling to include alterations to fenestration; external rendering and parking and landscaping following demolition of existing extensions*
- **24/02674/LBC** - *Internal and external alterations to existing outbuilding to facilitate the conversion of existing outbuilding to one self-contained 1-bed dwelling*

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 **OBJECTION** – The Bothy (former Engine House) is an early C20 understated curtilage-listed ‘service’ building for the estate. This ‘gardener’s building’ relates well to the grade II listed walled garden forming a key part of this grade II registered parkland landscape to Hexton Manor. By reason of the degree of embellishment: rendered finish, modification of window/door openings, parapet wall and thin stucco pediments, the transition to formal, polite dwellinghouse will adversely affect The Bothy’s character as a curtilage-listed building as it is unlikely that design codes would have been taken from the principal building and applied to buildings in the parkland landscape. The proposal will erode the character of the area, affecting the setting (and therefore the significance) of Hexton Manor, the character and appearance of the Hexton Conservation Area and the character of the Registered Park and Gardens. The degree of harm is considered to be moderate to low within the less than substantial harm range. The proposal fails to satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC only), 66(1) (FP only) and 72(1) (both) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990 and will not accord with Section 16 of the Framework and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031.

2.0 The Local Plan and NPPF (Dec 2024)

- 2.1 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).

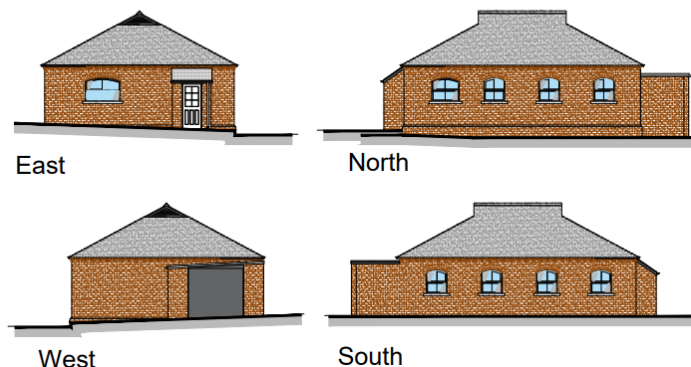
3.0 Context

- 3.1 At 9.1 and 9.2 of the Planning, Design, Access and Heritage Statement it is acknowledged that The Bothy is considered to be curtilage-listed to the main listed building of Hexton Manor, that it is located within the Hexton Conservation Area and within the grounds of Hexton Manor, designated as a historic park and garden. The building sits directly east of the grade II listed walls to the walled gardens at Hexton Manor which are described as:

Walls to walled gardens. Late C18 or early C19, and late C19 heightening. Red brick chequered with black headers in lower part in Flemish-bond. The walls of 2 adjoining large rectangular enclosures to SW of house, about 4M high generally but heightened to about 7M adjoining the village street on W where they are prominent in the Conservation Area.

- 3.2 I am conversant with the building and the site having commented previously under refs: 23/02724/FP & 23/02725/LBC where I referred to OS map regression and stated that The Bothy appears to have been built as an Engine House sometime between 1899 and 1922, therefore is early C20. The Bothy is a rather understated building set back from and to south of the west driveway. It almost goes unnoticed when approaching Hexton Manor.

Existing Elevations 1:100



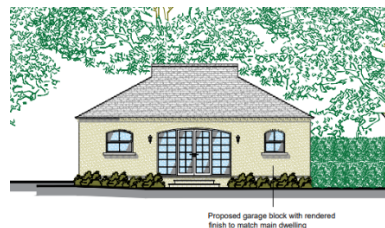
- 3.3 With respect to the roof covering, when I commented on 12 March 2024 it was on the understanding that plain tiles were to be used. However, an amended Plan - 2023-26-01A - Proposed plans / elevations was received on 3 April 2024 by which time the roof covering had been changed to 'Reproduction Westmoreland Slates to match the manor house'. I was not formally consulted on the amended plan and did not provide further comment on the roof material. The case officer did not mention the change in roof material in his delegated file note. The point of raising this is that had I found the reproduction slates objectionable; it would be difficult to sustain an objection considering the previous approval. It is assumed that what is intended to be used is a Reproduction Random Diminishing Westmorland Green Slate as per the type approved by the Lake District National Park Authority.

- 3.4 Whilst incorporating an extension in the design, the previously approved scheme also allowed for the facing brickwork and window openings to remain ensuring that the character of the former Engine House is evident.



4.0 The Proposal

- 4.1 This is a significantly different proposal to that previously granted essentially remodelling the building and transforming it from former Engine House/Bothy to formal self-contained 1-bed dwelling. The original submission maintained most of the existing window openings and with no feature parapet.



- 4.2 However, with no officer encouragement to change the scheme, this was amended. The extent of change is such that all existing window openings are changed and the window joinery removed. The character of the building would change markedly as facing brickwork gives way to render with parapets and curved arch headed windows give way to squared off openings with 6-over-6 sashes installed.



- 4.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that a formal garage building was granted under refs: 24/01466/FPH & 24/01467/LBC, the garage building will relate more closely with the main house. When commenting on the above applications, I referenced the thin stucco pediments at Hexton Manor and that this detail has been carried through and onto the garage building which, on the one hand,

may be seen as unifying the built forms, however, this embellishment on the new build could also be seen as a visual distraction when experiencing Hexton Manor. I questioned the need for this detail.



- 4.4 There are two key issues. First, what level of significance does The Bothy possess and should this be considered in the conversion? Secondly, would the proposal occasion harm to:
- The Bothy's character and appearance as a curtilage-listed building?
 - The setting and potentially, therefore, affecting the significance of Hexton Manor?
 - The character or appearance of the Hexton Conservation Area or the Registered Park and Gardens?
- 4.5 On the one hand maintaining a simple, understated brick-faced building would pay due regard to the building's significance and role on the estate. On the other hand, the latest iteration is arguably better presented as a small dwelling, but any suggestion of the building's former use and character would be erased. Essentially, this would appear as a new build within the grounds like the garage building referred at 4.3. Considering that the granted garage building is much larger and much closer to Hexton Manor it would be a challenge to say that the modified Bothy would harm the setting of Hexton Manor adversely affecting its significance. However, it is about context and the use and status of the garage building means that it reads well as an associated building alongside the main house. The same could not be said of The Bothy and this ultimately comes down to the significance or otherwise attached to The Bothy in its current form.
- 4.6 Considering the image below, it is accepted that creating a central doorway would address the condition of brickwork behind the downpipe and rendering would also cover up i) any scarring resulting from structures being removed and ii) window and door openings being modified. However, generally the brickwork is in reasonably good condition, and the brick double-header arches, dentil eaves and squint brick plinth course, all add visual interest.



- 4.7 Furthermore, considering that the far left-hand window in the above image is wider than the other windows, rather than a symmetrical formal front elevation, may be this window could be modified to provide a single door entrance and maintaining the other windows in-situ. Even here though,

considering that there is a side entrance into a lobby already, it would have made sense to utilise the same lobby arrangement.

- 4.8 First impressions are of a competent, well-balanced design that would echo features of Hexton Manor. However, for such a modest garden building, the render finish together with embellishment of feature parapet with pediment over the entrance and thin stucco pediments over other openings creates an overtly formal building. Its position and context on site arguably not justifying this level of adornment.
- 4.9 Considering my reservations above, I note that The Gardens Trust have been consulted but not replied (may be this could be followed up). However, The Gardens Trust has commented in relation to Old Generator House, Mill Lane, Hexton under ref: 24/02167/FP as follows:

*The modern design of the proposed building does not complement the half-timbered Victorian cottages, many of which were the original estate cottages surrounding the model farm. This modern design increases the presence of the Old Generator House, thereby **losing its subservient image as a 'service' building for the estate.** We would urge your officers to request a more sympathetic design that reflects the building's historic role within the landscape. **We are also concerned about references made to the Manor House in the Westmoreland roof slates. As a utilitarian 'service' building, design codes would not have been taken from the principal building in the landscape, but instead references should be made to surrounding buildings of a more similar status, such as the model farm.***

***Overall, the proposed development represents a moderate level of less than substantial harm, as it removes the Old Generator House's place as a 'service' building, thereby eroding the estate village setting of the RPG.** The transition between designed landscape parkland and the village is one of the key characteristics that gives Hexton Manor its historical significance. Whilst we acknowledge that there is some public benefit derived from conversion to a dwelling, the proposed design does not respect the place of the Old Generator House in the wider estate landscape. We urge that more modest proposals are put forward.*

- 4.10 The proposed Bothy conversion would also lose its subservient image as a 'service' building for the estate and would be part of a theme of rendered ancillary buildings experienced in the same parkland context alongside and which includes The Generator House (if granted) and the already granted garage building. Whilst each case is considered on its own merits this increased sense of uniformity of ancillary buildings with rendered finishes, sash windows, thin stucco pediments, Westmorland or Reproduction Westmorland Slate roof finishes will erode the positive contribution made by more utilitarian service buildings.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer