

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Andrew Hunter.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
24/02058/FP	Alterations to fenestration to lower ground floor front elevation	The Exchange Queen Street Hitchin Hertfordshire SG4 9TY

Submitted Plan Nos

LP01 EX-00-W EX-02-W EX-03 EX-03 PR-00 P01-W P02 P03 P04

1.0 Policies

D1	Sustainable design
D3	Protecting living conditions
HE1	Designated heritage assets
SECN12	Achieving well-designed places
SECN16	Conserve + enhance historic environment
SP13	Historic environment
SP9	Design and Sustainability

2.0 **Relevant site history**

- 2.1 24/01306/PNMA - Conversion to 24 self-contained 1-bed residential units with associated cycle and refuse/recycling provisions – Prior Approval Given 08/08/24.
- 2.2 24/00514/FP - Alterations to fenestration and new fenestration on front, side and rear elevations – Approved 24/04/24.
- 2.3 23/02718/FP - Alterations to fenestration and new fenestration on front, side and rear elevations – Refused 09/01/24 for:
 - 1. The proposed development by reason of its design, appearance, siting, and visual impacts, would result in harm to the character and appearance of the site and locality. Harm will also be caused to the setting and significance of the Hitchin Conservation Area as a designated heritage asset. The proposal would not comply with Policies SP9, SP13, D1 and HE1 of the Local Plan, and Sections 12 and 16 of the NPPF.
- 2.4 23/02630/PNMA - Conversion to 29 self-contained 1-bed residential units with associated cycle and refuse/recycling provisions – Refused 09/01/24 for:

1. The proposed development would not comply with the criterion set out in Class MA, Part 3, Schedule 2 of the 2015 General Permitted Development Order as amended. The proposal does not comply with Class MA, MA.1 (1) (a), MA.2 (2) (d), and MA.2 (2) (f) of Class MA, Part 3, Schedule 2 of the 2015 General Permitted Development Order as amended. The proposal does not comply with paragraph W (3) (a) and (b) of Part 3, Schedule 2 of the 2015 General Permitted Development Order as amended. The proposal is therefore not permitted development under Class MA of the Order. Prior Approval is therefore refused.

2.5 21/02573/FP - Conversion of existing ground floor gym into 10 residential dwellings (8 x 1-bed and 2 x 2-bed flats) with associated parking and infrastructure (as amended by plan received 08/10/21) – Pending.

2.6 19/02365/FP - Two storey roof extension to create 4 x 1-bed studio apartments and 6 x 2-bed apartments (third and fourth floors) with 10 allocated car parking spaces within existing car park area, cycle parking, bin storage facilities including a communal roof garden – Refused 10/01/20 for:

1. The proposed development, by reason of its siting, height and massing will result in a form of development that that is overdominant and out of scale with the surrounding pattern and scale of development. In addition the proposed design and materials are unsympathetic to the host building, refuse collection arrangements would not be satisfactory, and the development would have an adverse impact on the living conditions of existing residents. The proposal does not comply with Policy 57 of the 1996 Adopted Local Plan; Policies SP1, SP9, D1 of the Emerging Local Plan; and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. The application fails to address how surface water drainage will be managed contrary to the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Policy Guidance.

Appeal dismissed 03/12/20.

2.7 16/02291/1 - Two storey roof extension to create 4 x 1 bed and 10 x 2 bed self-contained apartments (third and fourth floors) with 12 allocated car parking spaces within the existing car park area, cycle parking and revised bin storage facilities. As amended by plan nos. 100C; 101C; 102C; 103D; 104C; 105C; 106 received 3/11/16 – Refused 15/12/16 for:

1. The proposed development, by reason of its siting, height and massing will result in a form of development that that is overdominant and out of scale with the surrounding pattern and scale of development. In addition the proposed design and materials are unsympathetic to the host building and the development would have an adverse impact on the living conditions of existing residents. The development would fail to enhance the character and quality of the area as required by Section 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The development would also be contrary to the provisions of Policy 57 of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan.

2. The proposed development would result in an underprovision of on site parking and a loss of existing parking within the site that is likely to lead to congestion on the local road work network that would detract from the visual and residential amenities of the locality. The development would be contrary to the provisions of Policy 55 and 57 of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan and Section 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. The submitted planning application has not been accompanied by a valid legal undertaking (in the form of a Section 106 Obligation) securing the provision of affordable housing or commuted sum in respect of affordable housing or other necessary obligations as set out in the Council's Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (adopted November 2006). The secure delivery of these obligations is required to mitigate the impact of the development in accordance with the adopted SPD, Policy 51 of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 - with Alterations (Saved Policies 2007) or emerging local plan Policy HS2 of the Council's Submission Local Plan October 2016.

4. The application fails to address how surface water drainage will be managed contrary to the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Policy Guidance.

- 2.8 12/00075/1 - Install 2 ventilation louvres in two ground floor windows of north elevation of building – Approved 29/02/12.
- 2.9 08/02916/1 - Installation of 2 aluminium louvres on north elevation at ground floor level following removal of existing windows – Approved 21/01/09.
- 2.10 08/01543/1 - Installation of 4 ventilation louvres to existing window apertures at 2nd floor level of east elevation of building – Approved 28/08/08.
- 2.11 00/00983/1 - Conversion of part of three storey building to provide 10 two bedroom; 6 three bedroom; 8 one bedroom flats; leisure club; associated cycle and vehicle parking (as amended by plans received 23.10.00 and 23.10.01) – Approved 29/10/01.

3.0 **Representations**

- 3.1 **Hitchin Forum** - We have no objections subject to there not being any proposals for accommodation in the Lower Ground Floor.

Our previous comments as set out in our earlier letters still apply:-

- ☐ There is no allocated parking for any of the flats. Some residents will have cars and there will be cars and vans belonging to those visiting/delivering.
- ☐ The brickwork alterations involved in effecting changes to the fenestration will likely mar the appearance of the building. The new brickwork and pointing required will not match the existing. The existing window openings are neatly detailed being steel-framed in rebated stone surrounds and stone cills. Will the new surrounds have the same appearance?

4.0 **Planning Considerations**

4.1 **Site and Surroundings**

- 4.1.1 The site comprises a two and three storey 1950's former telephone exchange building with a flat roof, located on the corner of Queen Street and Hollow Lane. The first and second floors are used as C3 residential accommodation. The ground and lower ground floors are used as a gym with ancillary uses (Use Class E).

- 4.1.2 The site adjoins an existing five storey building used as a BT exchange/offices, and has a car park higher than the site. C3 residential flats are opposite the site on Hollow Lane. Opposite the site on Queen Street are bus stops and a public car park, and the Grade I listed St Mary's Church and Grade II* The Biggin beyond. The site is in central Hitchin on the edge of the main commercial shopping area, where the locality has a predominantly commercial character. The site is close to a Conservation Area, the east boundary of which is on the eastern edge of Queen Street roadway with the footway adjacent to the application site.

4.2 **Proposal**

- 4.2.1 New and altered openings on the front elevation, that would serve the lower ground floor.

4.3 **Key Issues**

- 4.3.1 The key material considerations are character and appearance, and impacts on residential amenity.

Character and appearance

- 4.3.2 The Exchange is not a listed building and is not within a Conservation Area, neither is it considered sufficiently close to any listed buildings such that their settings and significance as designated heritage assets would be affected.
- 4.3.3 The Exchange is considered to have some character and visually attractive qualities such as its good quality exterior brickwork, differences in roof heights, stepped relationship with the corner of Queen Street and Hollow Lane and rising land levels up Hollow Lane, uniformity and spacing of fenestration and detailing particularly windows and light stone surrounds, distinctive recessed main entrance with name plate on the outside corner, and entrance archway next to The Bricklayers Arms with year marker. The various signage on the front elevation provide clutter which detracts from the appearance of the building, however the building is overall considered to be of a higher quality character and appearance.
- 4.3.4 The difference in roof heights, use of recesses, size and number of openings, and light stone plinth on the Queen Street and Hollow Lane elevations add visual interest to the building and help to reduce its visual dominance and sense of bulk and massing compared to other nearby buildings. The host building also appears well maintained and relatively clean, helping to preserve its character. The host building is considered to compare favourably in character, appearance and condition to the adjacent higher BT building and the 4/5 storey Balliol Chambers residential building on the opposite Queen Street/Hollow Lane corner.
- 4.3.5 As stated above, one of the positive aspects of the character and appearance of the building are the uniformity and spacing of fenestration and detailing particularly windows and light stone surrounds. This is particularly the case for its most prominent and visible front elevation.
- 4.3.6 The proposed altered and new front elevation windows would be within an area of light stone bricks, distinct from the mainly red brick front elevation of the building above. The

stone area serves a lower ground floor of the building, and has existing openings comprised of louvres and obscure panels, and two infilled windows near the front entrance.

- 4.3.7 The proposed new windows would be larger than the existing openings and infilled windows, however it is considered that they would be of a size and design in keeping with the larger windows above and the character and appearance of the building. The new windows are also considered as an improvement in some respects to the existing louvres and panels as these appear industrial and of a poorer quality appearance.
- 4.3.8 The proposed windows would remain clearly smaller than the ground and first floor larger windows above, and are considered to remain as serving the lower floor of the building. The new windows are considered to be of a size and spacing such that they would not appear cramped within their stone strip and in respect of the upper and lower boundaries of the stone strip with the red bricks above and where the building meets the public highway below. The design, size and siting of the new windows are also considered sufficient to overcome the concerns relating to refused application 23/02718/FP.
- 4.3.9 The new windows would be aluminium framed to match the existing, which will further ensure they would be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the building. The impacts on the character and appearance of the locality and on the settings and significance of designated heritage assets will not be harmful and are acceptable. No new accommodation is proposed on the lower ground floor.
- 4.3.10 Due to the proposal being considered acceptable in relation to the host building, it is also considered acceptable in its impacts on the character and appearance of the street scene, and the setting and significance of the nearby Conservation Area (complying with S72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which) requires that in the exercise of planning powers in conservation areas “special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area”). The design is considered acceptable, and the proposal complies with Policies SP9, SP13, D1 and HE1 of the Local Plan, and Sections 12 and 16 of the NPPF.

Residential amenity

- 4.3.11 The new and altered openings will face onto the public highway Queen Street. No residential properties will be overlooked by the resulting windows. Impacts on residential amenity are therefore considered acceptable. The proposal complies with Policy D3 of the Local Plan.

4.4 **Conclusion**

- 4.4.1 In the absence of material planning reasons to the contrary it is my view that planning permission is **GRANTED**.

5.0 **Recommendation**

- 5.1 That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the details specified in the application and supporting approved documents and plans listed above.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with details which form the basis of this grant of permission.

Biodiversity Net Gain

This development is not subject to the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan condition because it is considered exempt under the statutory exemptions (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-exempt-developments>) or transitional arrangements in respect of the biodiversity gain condition.

Proactive Statement:

Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. Discussion with the applicant to seek an acceptable solution was not necessary in this instance. The Council has therefore acted proactively in line with the requirements of the Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Signed  Anne McDonald	Development Management North Hertfordshire District Council Council Offices Gernon Road Letchworth Herts SG6 3JF
Determining Officer Date: 6 November 2024	