

# PLANNING STATEMENT

**FULL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED EXTERNAL  
ALTERATIONS TO WINDOWS AND DOORS, ROOF ALTERATIONS  
INCLUDING INSTALLATION OF DORMER WINDOWS AND INSET  
BALCONIES, HARD AND SOFT LANDSCAPING ALTERATIONS,  
REFUSE STORAGE AND CYCLE STORES**

**AT:**

**RADCLIFFE HOUSE, THE PRIORY, OLD CHARLTON ROAD,  
HITCHIN, SG5 2DW**

Submitted on behalf of:

**Metric + Maker Limited**

**April 2026**

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application is submitted on behalf of our client, Metric + Maker Limited (“the Applicant”), to the Local Planning Authority (“LPA”) at North Hertfordshire District Council (“NHDC”) as a Full Planning Application (“the Application”) for external alterations and associated landscaping enhancements at Radcliffe House, Old Charlton Road, Hitchin, SG5 2DW (‘the Application Site’).
- 1.2 Radcliffe House is a three-storey office building located immediately adjacent to the Hitchin town centre boundary and within the identified settlement boundary of Hitchin. The Application Site is accessible via both Old Charlton Road and Tilehouse Street. Radcliffe House forms a group of three office buildings made up by Pease House and Keynes House, plus several ancillary buildings including cycle and waste storage structures.

## **Description of development**

- 1.3 The proposed description of development for the Application is as follows:

**External alterations to windows and doors, roof alterations with installation of inset balconies and dormer windows, hard and soft landscaping alterations, refuse storage and cycle stores (“the Proposed Development”).**

- 1.4 It should be noted that the Application only seeks permission for alterations to the existing building and the associated landscape areas and does not seek to alter the use of the existing office building.
- 1.5 The Application is accompanied by the supporting documents and drawings set out in **Tables 1 and 2**:

| <b>TABLE 1: SCHEDULE OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS</b>  |                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Document</b>                                   | <b>Author</b>         |
| Covering Letter                                   | Planit Consulting     |
| Application Form and Ownership Certificates       |                       |
| Flood Risk Assessment                             | Water Environment Ltd |
| Preliminary Ecological Appraisal                  | MKA Ecologist         |
| Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain Metric and Report |                       |
| Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Survey   | Barton-Hyett          |
| Transport Statement                               | i-Transport           |
| Planning Statement                                | Planit Consulting     |
| Heritage Statement                                |                       |
| Design and Access Statement                       | Opstead               |

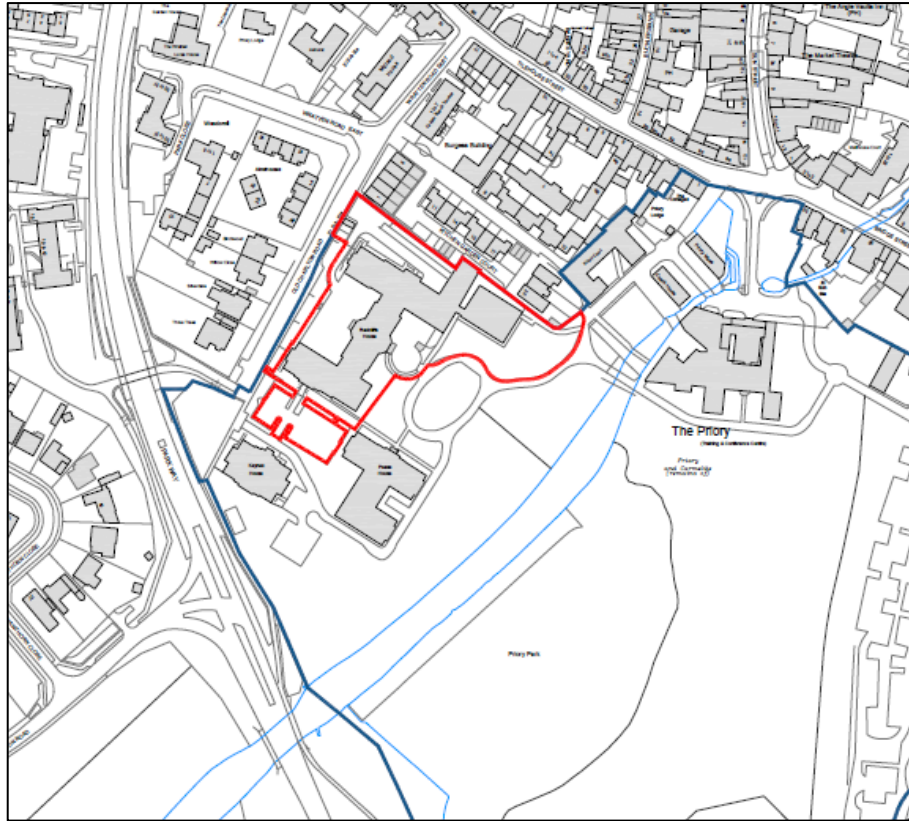
| TABLE 2: DRAWING SCHEDULE                            |                                |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Drawing Title                                        | Drawing Number                 |
| <b>Architectural drawings prepared by Opstead</b>    |                                |
| Site Location Plan                                   | 133-OP-PL-SP-A-101             |
| Existing Site Plan                                   | 133-OP-PL-SP-A-102             |
| Proposed Site Plan                                   | 133-OP-PL-SP-A-103             |
| Existing Basement Floor Plan                         | 133-OP-PL-EP-A-001             |
| Existing Ground Floor Plan                           | 133-OP-PL-EP-A-002             |
| Existing First Floor Plan                            | 133-OP-PL-EP-A-003             |
| Existing Second Floor Plan                           | 133-OP-PL-EP-A-004             |
| Existing Third Floor Plan                            | 133-OP-PL-EP-A-005             |
| Existing Roof Plan                                   | 133-OP-PL-EP-A-006             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-001             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-002             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-003             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-004             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-005             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-006             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-007             |
| Existing Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-EE-A-008             |
| Proposed Basement Plan                               | 133-OP-PL-PP-A-101             |
| Proposed Ground Floor Plan                           | 133-OP-PL-PP-A-102             |
| Proposed First Floor Plan                            | 133-OP-PL-PP-A-103             |
| Proposed Second Floor Plan                           | 133-OP-PL-PP-A-104             |
| Proposed Third Floor Plan                            | 133-OP-PL-PP-A-105             |
| Proposed Roof Plan                                   | 133-OP-PL-PP-A-106             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-101             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-102             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-103             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-104             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-105             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-106             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-107             |
| Proposed Elevations and Sections                     | 133-OP-PL-PE-A-108             |
| <b>Landscape drawings prepared by HTA Design LLP</b> |                                |
| Landscape General Arrangement Plan                   | MAM-HPL-050 RH HTA-L DR 0900 I |
| Hard Landscape Plan                                  | MAM-HPL-050 RH HTA-L DR 0920 C |
| Soft Landscape Plan                                  | MAM-HPL-050 RH HTA-L DR 0950 C |
| Landscape Design Statement                           | MAM-HPL-050 RH HTA-L DR 0700 C |

1.6 The remainder of this statement will cover:

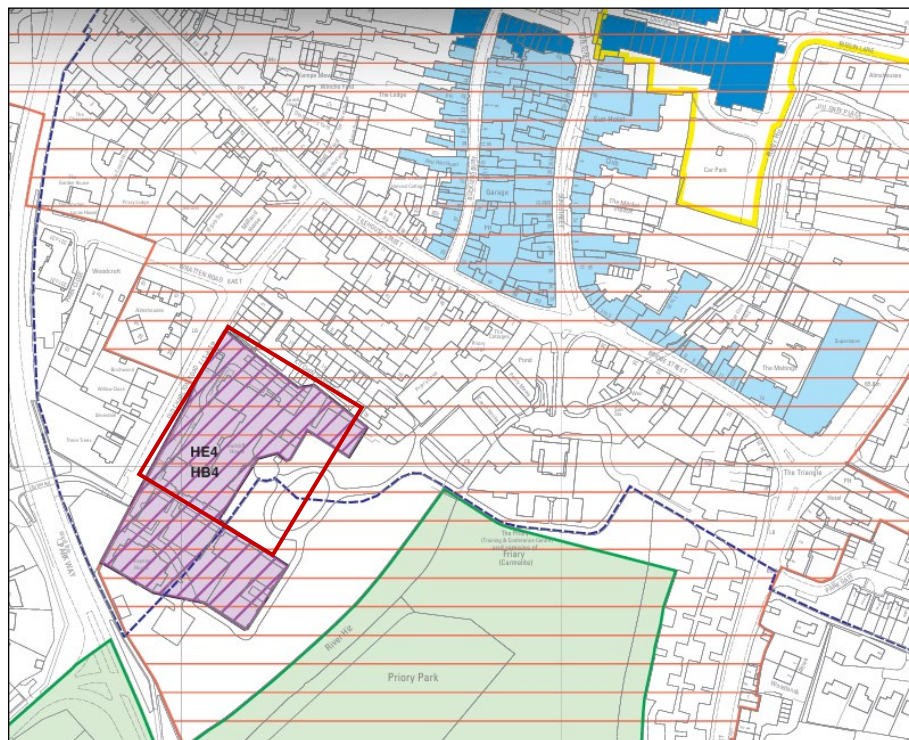
- a. Site description and the surrounding area
- b. The Proposed Development
- c. Relevant planning policy context
- d. Planning considerations
- e. Planning balance and conclusion

## **2 SITE DESCRIPTION AND THE SURROUNDING AREA**

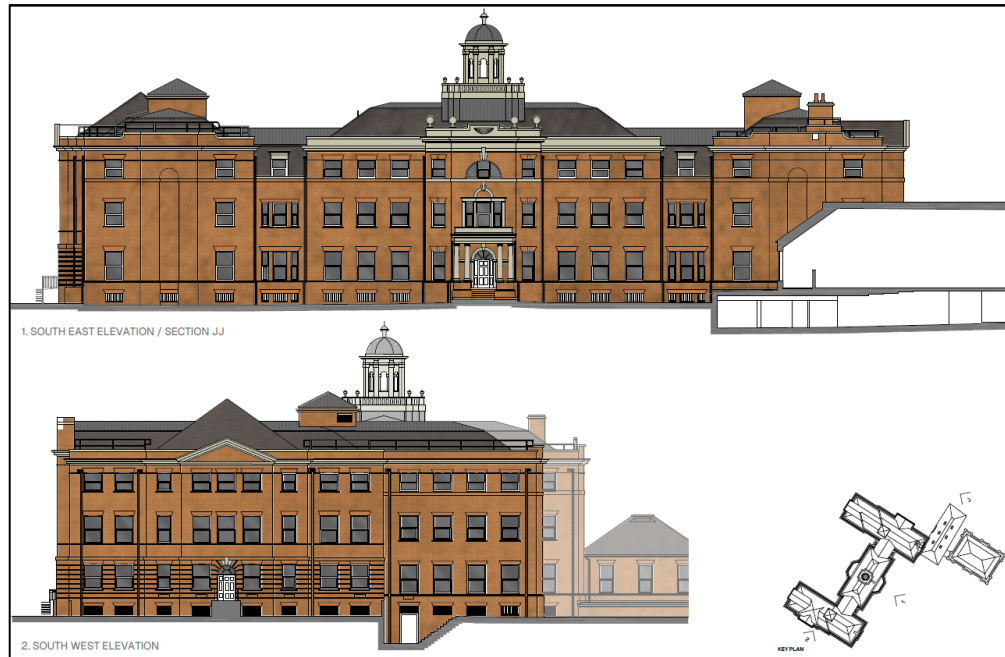
- 2.1 Radcliffe House is a three-storey red-brick modern office building located within the identified settlement boundary of Hitchin and Hitchin Town Centre. The Application Site benefits from excellent sustainable transport connections, with Hitchin Railway Station located 1 mile to the north and bus and coach services available at Moormead Close (0.5 miles west) and Bancroft (0.3 miles north). The town centre, offering a wide range of shops and services, is located less than 0.1 miles from the Application Site.
- 2.2 The Application Site has car parking facilities within a basement beneath the building and at ground level to the west of the building. The façades are characterised by regular white-framed casement windows set within brick reveals.
- 2.3 To the west, the Application Site contains a secluded hard-surfaced courtyard currently utilised as a car park. To the east, the grounds open into extensive landscaped areas comprising lawns, mature trees, shrubs and footpaths. In contrast, the immediate perimeter of the building is dominated by concrete and tarmac hardstanding, offering limited visual or ecological value. These surroundings form part of the wider landscaped setting associated with Priory Park.
- 2.4 Radcliffe House is situated within Hitchin Conservation Area. It is not a statutory or locally listed building. There are several grade II listed buildings to the north and north east at 1 and 2 Tilehouse Street, the Coach House, the Garden Bridge, the Stables and the grade I listed building at The Priory.
- 2.5 The Application Site is located within Flood Zone 1 and therefore a low risk of fluvial flooding. The Application Site is within a surface water risk zone (1 in 30, 1 in 100 and 1 in 1000 events).
- 2.6 The location of the Application Site is shown in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** below.



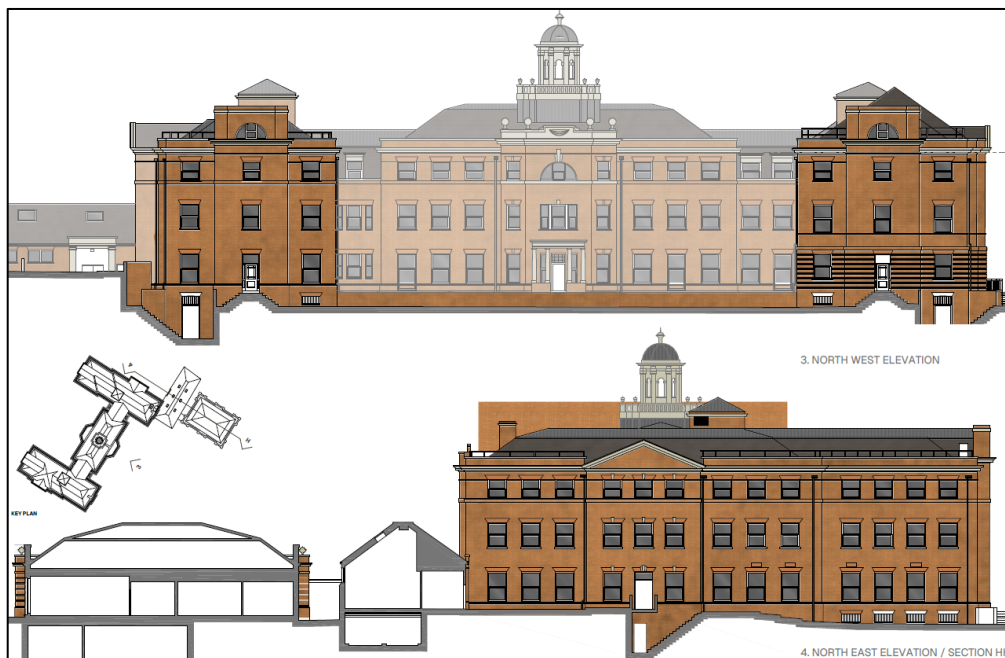
**Figure 1: Site location plan of Radcliffe House**



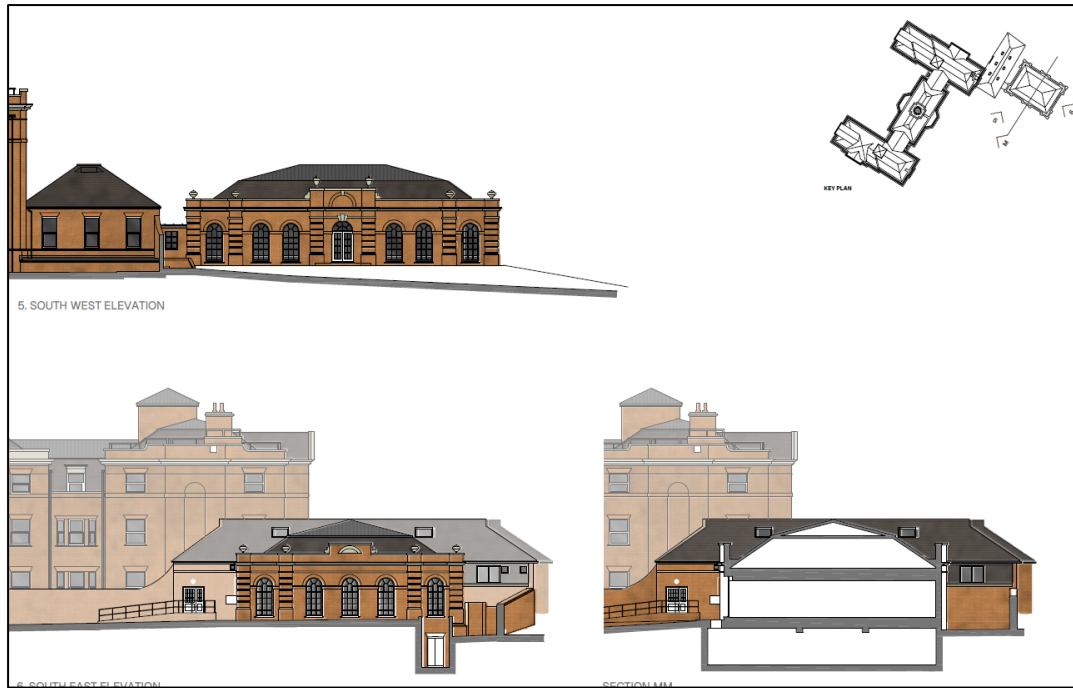
**Figure 2: Map showing the site's proximity to the town centre, outlined in blue (right)**



**Figure 3: Existing elevation drawings**



**Figure 4: Existing elevation drawings**



**Figure 5: Existing elevation drawings**



**Figure 6: Existing elevation drawings**

### 3 **PLANNING HISTORY**

3.1 The planning history relevant to the Application Site set out in **Table 3.1** below:

| <b>TABLE 3.1: PLANNING HISTORY</b> |                                                                                                         |                        |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Planning Reference</b>          | <b>Description</b>                                                                                      | <b>Decision</b>        |
| 24/01669/PNMA                      | Conversion to 49 residential dwellings                                                                  | Approved<br>15.10.2024 |
| 18/01143/FP                        | External alterations including addition of louvres.                                                     | Approved<br>28.06.2018 |
| 11/03089/1                         | Installation of disabled access ramp adjacent existing wall                                             | Approved<br>21.02.2012 |
| 88/01916/1                         | Entrance portico to north west elevation                                                                | Approved<br>29.11.1988 |
| 86/00567/1                         | The erection of covered service yard in association with office development.                            | Approved<br>25.09.1986 |
| 83/00313/1                         | Redevelopment of the Application Site to provide the three office buildings and 140 car parking spaces. | Approved<br>20.10.1983 |

3.2 The prior approval consent 24/01669/PNMA, granted on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2024, has not been implemented and remains extant until 15<sup>th</sup> October 2027. The proposed landscape changes and external alterations are independent of the building's use and are equally appropriate whether Radcliffe House remains in office use or is later converted under the approved residential fallback.

## **4 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The Proposed Development comprises minor external alterations to the building and associated landscape, refuse and cycle storage improvements.

### External alterations

- 4.2 The external alterations have been designed in a modern contemporary style that sits comfortably within the established architectural form of Radcliffe House. While the interventions provide a contemporary edge to the building, they remain visually recessive and sympathetic to the building's proportions, ensuring that its overall character is enhanced rather than transformed.
- 4.3 In summary, the Proposed Development includes the following:
- a. Replacement of selected windows to form new openings.
  - b. The addition of decorative window bars to existing windows
  - c. Introduction of new external doors at ground-floor level.
  - d. Installation of rooflights and modestly scaled dormer windows and balconies within existing roof slopes.
  - e. The new dormer windows, rooflights and inset balconies follow a minimalist contemporary design, using simple profiles and clean lines that complement the building's modern office character. Their restrained size and placement ensure they sit discreetly within the roof plane.
  - f. Although contemporary in style, the materials and finishes have been chosen to respect the sensitivities of the Hitchin Conservation Area and the nearby listed buildings, including the Grade I Priory and the Grade II buildings along Tilehouse Street.

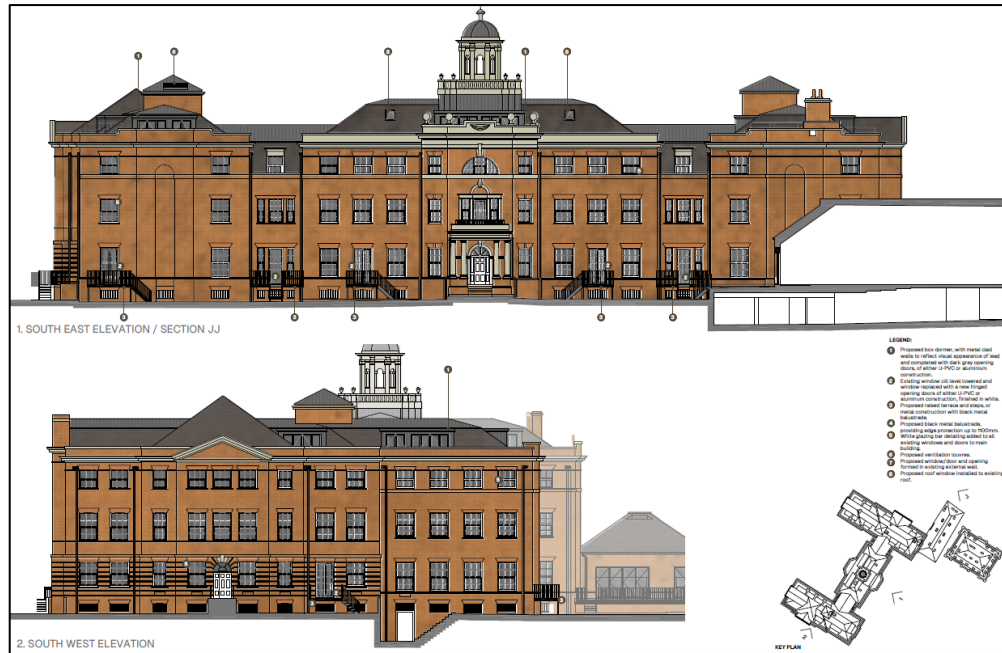


Figure 7: Proposed elevation drawings

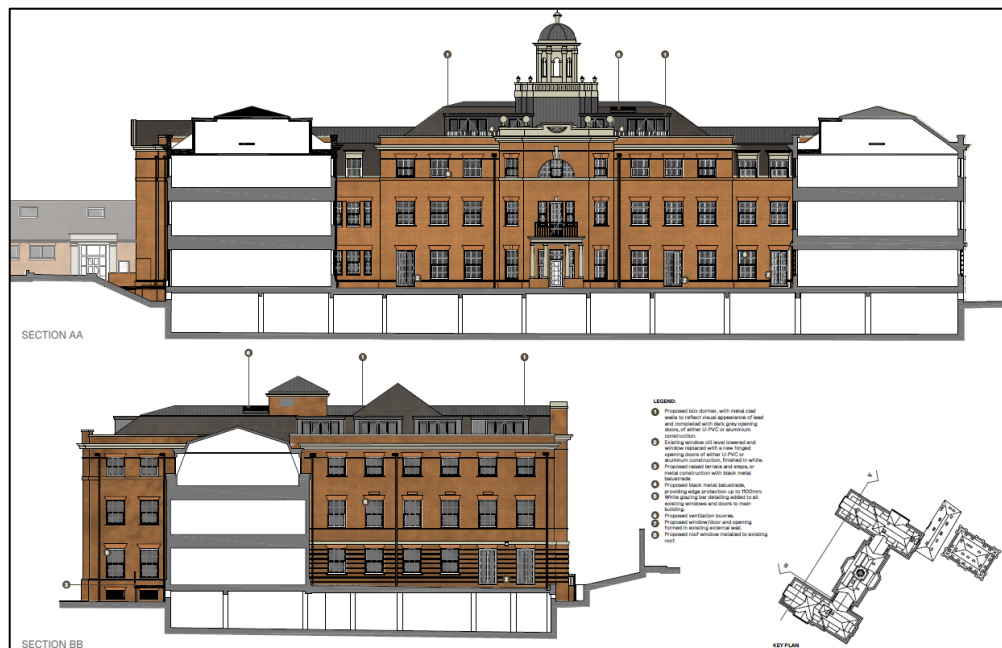


Figure 8: Proposed elevation drawings



Figure 9: Proposed elevation drawings



Figure 10: Proposed elevation drawings

## Landscape enhancements

- 4.4 The landscape proposals deliver a substantial qualitative enhancement to the setting of Radcliffe House. By replacing extensive areas of hardstanding with biodiverse lawns, structured planting, native hedgerows and high-quality garden spaces, the scheme significantly improves the site's visual character and environmental performance. Furthermore, the existing parking area within the courtyard is proposed to be replaced with a decorative

courtyard. The design draws upon the established landscape typologies, woodland fringe, garden forecourt, Italian terraced courtyard planting to create a coherent, estate-appropriate landscape that strengthens the verdant character of the historic parkland setting and the Conservation Area. The existing tarmac road is to be resurfaced with a tar spray and chip finish, which provides a softer, more natural and less urban appearance than standard asphalt.

4.5 The proposals introduce a series of private terraces and garden spaces to Radcliffe House and its associated ancillary buildings. These spaces provide:

- a. Levelled terraces directly accessed from internal rooms.
- b. Generous patio areas suitable for seating, planting and outdoor use.
- c. Defined garden plots with hedging and soft landscaping.
- d. Visual continuity with the Italian terrace design language as well as the historical landscape character.
- e. These terraces replace areas of tarmac with attractive, usable outdoor amenity space, improving the relationship between the buildings and their landscape setting. The gardens also contribute positively to daylight, outlook and overall residential amenity, should the extant residential fallback be implemented in future.
- f. A new basement secure cycle storage and external visitor cycle stands.

4.6 These interventions provide clear visual, ecological and amenity benefits, transforming a largely tarmac-dominated environment into an attractive and contextually sensitive parkland setting. As a result, the landscape scheme makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area while supporting an enhanced sense of place and overall site quality.

### Parking layout

- 

Radcliffe House, Tilehouse Street, Hitchin  
Planning Statement  
April 2026

- 4.8 An existing cycle storage is located on the northwest corner of the Application Site as well as in two new stores at basement level accommodating 124 cycle parking spaces both for residents and visitors in total. In addition, an enlarged refuse store is also proposed at basement floor level with a mechanically assisted tug used to transport bins from the refuse store to the collection point.

## **5 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

- 5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires all applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

### **The Development Plan**

#### **North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 ("the Local Plan")**

- 5.2 The relevant Local Plan policies are considered in detail against the proposal in the planning assessment below. The following policies are considered relevant in the assessment of the Application.

- SP6: Sustainable Transport
- SP9: Design and Sustainability
- SP11: Natural Resources and Sustainability
- SP12: Green Infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity
- SP13: Historic Environment
- T1: Assessment of Transport Matters
- T2: Parking
- D1: Sustainable Design
- D3: Protecting living conditions
- HE1: Designated Heritage Assets
- HE3: Non-designated Heritage Assets
- NE5: Protecting Open Space
- NE6: New and Improved Open Space
- NE7: Reducing Flood Risk

### **Material considerations**

#### **National Planning Policy Framework 2024**

- 5.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) serves as the overarching planning policy document for England and is a material planning consideration in planning decisions.
- 5.4 The key objective of the NPPF is to achieve sustainable development and at the heart of the framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The following chapters are considered relevant in the assessment of this planning application.

- Chapter 2: Achieving sustainable development
- Chapter 4: Decision-making
- Chapter 9: Promoting sustainable transport
- Chapter 12: Achieving well-designed places
- Chapter 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Supplementary Planning Document

- Vehicle Parking at New Development (September 2011)
- Hitchin Conservation Area Character Statement (July 2011)

**Planning designations**

5.5 The following planning designations, as defined on the Council's Policies Map, are relevant to the Application Site:

- Hitchin Settlement Boundary
- Employment Area
- Hitchin Conservation Area
- Adjacent Grade II Listed Buildings (1 and 2 Tilehouse Street, the Coach House, the Garden Bridge, the Stables located north and northeast of the site)
- Adjacent Grade I Listed Building (The Priory, east of the site)
- Flood Zone 1

5.6 The planning considerations relevant to the Application are discussed in the following section.

## **6 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The planning considerations relevant to the Proposed Development are as follows:

- a. The principle of development
- b. The effect on the character and significance of heritage assets
- c. The impact on neighbouring amenity
- d. Highways and parking considerations
- e. The impact on biodiversity and trees
- f. Flood risk and drainage

6.2 These issues are addressed in turn below.

### **Principle of development**

- 6.3 The Application Site is located within the settlement boundary of Hitchin and is adjacent to the town centre boundary. Policy D1 of the Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted where development responds positively to its local context and takes reasonable opportunities to enhance the public realm, improve landscaping, accessibility and sustainability.
- 6.4 The NPPF at paragraph 135 requires development to be well-designed, visually attractive, sympathetic to local character and to contribute positively to the quality and sense of place of the area. The proposed alterations and landscaping meet these aims through sensitive design and improvements to the site's setting.
- 6.5 The principle of external alterations and landscape enhancements to an existing office building within the Hitchin settlement boundary is acceptable in land-use terms. The works are limited to the building's external fabric and surrounding hardstanding and do not introduce new floorspace or intensify the established office use.
- 6.6 While the building benefits from an extant prior approval (ref. 24/01669/PNMA) to convert the office accommodation to 49 residential apartments, this has not been implemented. The proposed alterations would not prejudice that fallback position and are compatible with both the existing office use and the approved residential use.
- 6.7 The principle of development is therefore supported. It will be further demonstrated below how the Proposed Development accords with the detailed requirements of Policy D1 of the Local

Plan and the NPPF by responding positively to the site's context, replacing hardstanding with high-quality soft landscaping, enhancing the public realm, improving accessibility and reducing surface-water runoff through increased permeable areas.

**The effect on the character and significance of heritage assets**

- 6.8 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that in considering applications which affect listed buildings, Local Planning Authorities must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
- 6.9 Section 72 of the same Act requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas when determining applications affecting land or buildings within them.
- 6.10 In addition, the NPPF provides clear guidance on the assessment of heritage impacts, including the need to consider the significance of designated heritage assets, the potential for harm, and the requirement for such harm to be clearly justified. The relevant heritage policies are set out in Chapter 16 of the NPPF, including paragraphs relating to the conservation and enhancement of historic environments.
- 6.11 The Application Site lies within the Hitchin Conservation Area and is located within the setting of several nearby listed buildings. These include Grade II listed buildings at 1 and 2 Tilehouse Street, the Coach House, the Garden Bridge, and the Stables, as well as the Grade I listed Priory situated to the east. These assets derive their significance from their architectural quality, historic form and contribution to the historic parkland setting of Priory Park. A Heritage Statement has been prepared, which evaluates the historic character and significance of the nearby heritage assets.
- 6.12 Policy HE1 of the Local Plan states that proposals affecting Conservation Areas or listed buildings to assess significance, justify impacts, and minimise harm. Furthermore, Policy HE3 requires a balanced judgement for any impact on non-designated heritage significance.
- 6.13 Policy D1 also applies and requires development to respond positively to its local context, reinforce local character and deliver high-quality design that respects heritage sensitivities.
- 6.14 The proposed works to Radcliffe House and its ancillary buildings are modest in scale and remain wholly within the existing footprint and massing of the building. They comprise the

replacement of selected windows with new door openings, the insertion of rooflights, and the introduction of fitted-in balconies, alongside a series of minor elevational refinements. None of these alterations increase the building's height, bulk or visual prominence, nor do they alter the established spatial relationship between Radcliffe House and The Priory. The new balconies are set entirely within the roof plane rather than projecting outward, ensuring the simplicity of the existing roof profile is preserved and that the building's silhouette, ridge line and eaves remain consistent. This recessed, visually unobtrusive approach provides improved amenity while maintaining a recessive appearance within the Conservation Area. The refined arrangement of new and altered openings also follows the established rhythm and proportions of the existing façades, ensuring that the architectural character of Radcliffe House is respected and reinforced, and that no visual intrusion is introduced into the Conservation Area or the setting of nearby listed buildings.

- 6.15 A substantial belt of mature vegetation and trees along the eastern and northern boundaries provides some screening between Radcliffe House and The Priory, maintaining the listed building's sense of separation and protecting its wider parkland setting. This intervening vegetation also limits visibility from Priory Park, ensuring the external alterations result in no harm to the significance or setting of these heritage assets.
- 6.16 The landscape proposals include the removal of extensive areas of hardstanding and replacing these with new planting, lawned areas and soft-landscaped edges. These changes will create a more natural, sympathetic setting that better reflects the verdant character of Priory Park and enhance the Conservation Area's appearance.
- 6.17 The replacement of extensive hard surfacing with a more refined and contextually appropriate landscape treatment substantially enhances the visual quality of the courtyard and reinforces its relationship with the wider Priory estate.
- 6.18 The introduction of new garden areas around the building further softens the building's appearance and improve the overall landscape quality of the Application Site. These enhancements remain fully compatible with the established office use and any future residential use.
- 6.19 The application of 'tar spray and chip' to the existing tarmac road reduces visual dominance, minimises glare, and ensures the access route integrates more sensitively with the Conservation Area, the landscape strategy and the setting of nearby listed buildings. It also

allows enhancement of the road surface without the need for full reconstruction, reducing disturbance while delivering a high-quality estate-appropriate finish.

- 6.20 The landscape changes therefore deliver a modest beneficial effect on the setting of these heritage assets, improving the Application Site's contribution to the Conservation Area while maintaining the existing level of screening to nearby listed buildings.
- 6.21 Given the modest scale of the alterations, the matching materials and the existing landscape screening, the proposals would result in no harm to the setting or significance of nearby listed buildings and would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Overall, the scheme enhances the Application Site's landscape quality and delivers a neutral to beneficial heritage outcome, fully in accordance with Policies HE1 and HE3 and the NPPF.

#### **The impact on neighbour amenity**

- 6.22 The proposed dormer and balcony windows and rooflights will not cause any unacceptable overlooking or loss of privacy. The nearest neighbouring residential properties at 8-30 Old Charlton Road are located approximately 40m away which is a substantial distance in an urban location and ensures a reasonable degree of privacy is maintained.
- 6.23 If the approved changes of use of Pease House or Radcliffe House to residential were implemented, the separation distance, building orientation and interrelationship between buildings, ensure that no unacceptable overlooking or loss of privacy would be caused to future occupants.
- 6.24 Should the extant prior approval for the Application Site be implemented, the creation of private garden spaces for the ground-floor apartments providing residents with usable outdoor space, improved outlook and opportunities for planting, all of which enhance residential amenity without affecting neighbouring properties. The introduction of new rooflights provides improved daylight levels to habitable rooms while remaining discreetly positioned within existing roof slopes, ensuring no overlooking or loss of privacy. Overall, the scheme enhances on-site residential amenity and maintains acceptable relationships with all surrounding uses.

#### **Highways and parking considerations**

- 6.25 Policy SP6 of the Local Plan encourages development in locations that enable sustainable journeys to key services and facilities. In addition, the NPPF requires development to promote sustainable modes of travel, reduce reliance on the private car, and ensure that opportunities

for walking, cycling and public transport are maximised (*NPPF Chapter 9: Promoting Sustainable Transport*). Together, these policies support development in accessible locations such as Pease House, where trips can be made by non-car modes.

- 6.26 Policy T2 allows for flexibility where variations from standard parking levels can be justified by factors such as site accessibility, availability of public transport, surrounding land uses, and opportunities for sustainable travel.
- 6.27 The accompanying Transport Statement prepared by i-Transport evaluates the transport-related effects of the proposed removal of ground level parking. It considers both the impacts on the surrounding highway network and the site's accessibility by a range of transport modes.
- 6.28 A total of 77 existing car parking spaces serving Radcliffe House are located in surface level car parks. This will be reduced to 65 spaces as a result of the Proposed Development so to prioritise enhancements to the public realm and landscape environment around the Application Site. Secure external cycle storage for 124 cycle parking spaces will be provided, exceeding the minimum requirements for the consented residential use and supporting sustainable travel choices.
- 6.29 The Application Site is located within the identified settlement boundary of Hitchin, immediately adjacent to the town centre. It benefits from excellent accessibility to shops, services and public transport, including Hitchin Railway Station and nearby bus and coach services at Moormead Close and Bancroft. The Transport Statement sets out several reasons why the proposed amount of car parking is sufficient to meet the parking demands of both the existing office use and the extant residential prior approval. Consistent with Local Plan Policy T2, a reduced on-site car parking provision is acceptable, would not be necessary to meet identified demand and could undermine sustainable transport objectives. Visitor parking is also available within nearby public car parks.

### **Ecology and trees**

- 6.30 Policy SP12 (Green Infrastructure, Landscape and Biodiversity) of the Local Plan requires development to protect, enhance and reinforce the District's network of green infrastructure, ensure a net gain in biodiversity wherever possible, and safeguard important landscape features. This policy establishes a strategic framework that supports proposals which introduce new planting, improve ecological value, and strengthen site character.

- 6.31 The Application Site is not subject to any national or local ecological designations. Furthermore, there are no Tree Preservation Order (TPO) within or immediately adjacent to the Application Site. Consent is, however, required to undertake any works to the existing trees on or around the Application Site by virtue of it falling within a Conservation Area. The scheme proposes the removal of a cockspur thorn, a dogwood and viburnum group (G2), as well as a small, clipped yew hedge (H4). Furthermore, two trees are to be pruned this includes, T1 and T2. The arboricultural consultant advises that, as these small trees are not visible from any public viewpoint, their removal would result in a negligible impact on public visual amenity.
- 6.32 The scheme introduces additional native planting and new hedgerows, as detailed in the landscape drawings, alongside the replacement of existing hardstanding with soft-landscaped garden areas. Several ornamental trees are proposed to be located within the courtyard and basement entrance as part of the Proposed Development as well as hedging around the premises.
- 6.33 The Application Site extends to approximately 0.71 hectares and comprises modified grassland, introduced shrub planting, urban trees, non-native hedgerows and areas of developed land. The habitats are of low to moderate ecological value and are typical of managed, urban sites. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was undertaken by MKA Ecology Ltd in March 2026 to inform the proposed external alterations and landscaping works at Radcliffe House. The assessment comprised a desk-based data search and an extended Phase 1 habitat survey in accordance with CIEEM guidance.
- 6.34 The appraisal considered the potential for protected and notable species to be present, based on habitat suitability, desk-based records and field survey observations. MKA Ecology concludes that the proposed development is ecologically acceptable in principle, subject to proportionate mitigation and further survey work where necessary. Plants, invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles were assessed as having a negligible likelihood of being present due to limited habitat suitability on site. The building contains features with moderate potential for roosting bats, including weep vents, gaps in brickwork and basement access points. Two trees (TB1 and TB2) are proposed to be pruned may also support bat roosting potential. A Ground-Level Tree Assessment will be undertaken and completed prior to the commencement of any works onsite. A sensitive lighting strategy is in place to ensure no light spill and to protect potential bat roosting and foraging habitat.

- 6.35 These enhancements provide a meaningful uplift in ecological value and strengthen the site's green character. The proposals accord with local biodiversity and tree-protection objectives, and given the limited scope of works, no adverse biodiversity impacts are anticipated.

### **Biodiversity Net Gain**

- 6.36 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is mandatory in England, requiring most new development projects to deliver at least a 10% increase in habitat value compared to the pre-development baseline. Mandatory for major developments since February 2024, and small sites from April 2024, it necessitates a Biodiversity Gain Plan, habitat management for 30 years, and following a mitigation hierarchy of avoid, mitigate and compensate.
- 6.37 The requirement is reinforced by national policy in the NPPF (*Chapter 15*), which seeks measurable biodiversity enhancements as part of sustainable development, and by Local Plan Policy SP12, which requires development to protect, enhance and create biodiversity and green infrastructure. Together, these frameworks establish a clear expectation that development proposals contribute positively to local ecological networks.
- 6.38 A Biodiversity Net Gain assessment has been undertaken by MKA Ecology, who confirm that the baseline habitats have not been significantly altered since 30 January 2020 and that none of the habitats present are classed as irreplaceable under the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024. Due to the nature of the proposals, none of the statutory exemptions to mandatory BNG apply.
- 6.39 The proposed development includes on-site landscaping enhancements and external alterations to Radcliffe House, with post-development habitats comprising modified grassland, other neutral grassland, introduced shrub planting, vegetated garden areas, retained and newly planted urban trees, and a new native hedgerow.
- 6.40 A BNG statutory metric has been completed in relation to the overall site and demonstrates that a 43.6% net gain in habitat units and 538.50% net gain in hedgerow units can be achieved. This significantly exceeds the mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement, and as such should be afforded moderate positive weight in the planning balance as a meaningful environmental benefit arising from the Proposed Development.

### **Flood risk and drainage**

6.41 The Application Site lies within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at low risk of fluvial flooding, in accordance with the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning. As such, the location of the development complies with Policy NE7(a) of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031, which directs development to areas at lowest probability of flooding wherever possible. The only identified source of flood risk relates to surface water flooding. A site-specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been submitted in support of the Application. The FRA has been prepared in accordance with national guidance and Policy NE7(c) and confirms that only minor mitigation is required. This primarily comprises raising the threshold at the western pedestrian archway to limit potential surface-water ingress to the basement, with all other flood risks being low and appropriately managed through existing drainage infrastructure and site levels. In line with the FRA recommendations, the redevelopment will incorporate:

- Raise the threshold level at the western pedestrian archway.
- Ensuring external levels and pathways continue to direct overland flows away from building entrances.
- Retain and rely on existing on-site drainage.
- Increased soft landscaping, which reduce impermeable surfaces and improves surface-water infiltration around the building.

6.42 With these measures in place, the proposal appropriately manages surface-water risk and results in no increased flood risk to occupants or the surrounding area.

6.43 With these measures in place, the Proposed Development is designed and laid out to reduce flood risk and not increase flood risk elsewhere, fully satisfying Policy NE7(d). The works do not involve ground reprofiling or the introduction of new structures and do not affect any functional floodplain or overland flow routes, in accordance with Policy NE7(g). The replacement of impermeable surfaces with permeable soft landscaping reduces surface water runoff and improves overall drainage performance. No flood-risk concerns arise, and the proposal is fully compliant with Policy NE7 of the Local Plan, the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, and national policy guidance.

## **7 PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION**

7.1 This Planning Statement has demonstrated that the proposed external alterations and landscape enhancements at Radcliffe House are acceptable and should be supported for the following reasons:

- a. The proposed external alterations are modest, utilise matching materials and are sensitively designed to respect the building's form, delivering a high-quality improvement to its appearance.
- b. The submitted Heritage Statement confirms a neutral to moderate beneficial effect on the character and setting of the Hitchin Conservation Area and the nearby listed buildings. Mature boundary vegetation provides effective screening to The Priory and Priory Park, ensuring no harm to setting of these listed assets.
- c. The landscaping proposals, which include transforming the hard-surfaced courtyard into a planted garden space, reducing areas of hardstanding, and introducing new planting and defined garden zones, will provide a notable uplift to both the visual and ecological quality of the Radcliffe House setting. These improvements will enhance the character and appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area, reinforcing its established green, parkland character.
- d. Owing to the sympathetic design, scale and materiality of the proposed external alterations, the scheme will have a neutral effect on the setting of the nearby listed buildings, with no harm to their significance or their appreciated relationship with the surrounding historic landscape. The proposals result in no adverse impact on neighbour amenity, with sufficient separation distances ensuring dormers and rooflights do not create overlooking or loss of privacy.
- e. The scheme retains an appropriate level of parking and secure cycle storage, and the Application Site's highly sustainable and accessible location ensures future users are not car-dependent, thereby supporting the sustainable transport objectives of the Local Plan.
- f. The FRA identifies surface water flooding as the only relevant risk. With appropriate mitigation, there is no increased flood risk to occupiers or surrounding land.
- g. The Proposed Development delivers notable ecological enhancements and a BNG in excess of that required by the Environment Act adding moderate positive weight in the planning balance.

- 7.2 The Proposed Development delivers clear environmental and visual benefits, results in no identified harm, and responds positively to the site's context and constraints. Overall, the proposal constitutes a well-considered improvement to the site and its setting, and it is therefore respectfully submitted that planning permission should be granted.