REAR OF 56-58 LEYS AVENUE, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, HERTFORDSHIRE SG6 3EG

PLANNING STATEMENT, HERITAGE STATEMENT & DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

In support of

PLANNING APPLICATION

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1.0 Introduction

This application is for the demolition of a detached ancillary storage building located to the rear of retail premises and the erection of three apartments on the same footprint.

2.0 Planning History

The existing building was built in 2000 to provide an ancillary storage and display facility for F. Martin furnishers (premises located on Leys Avenue).

The local planning history is extensive and of course recorded.
Notably perhaps, Change of Use in 2004 enabled some of the first and second floorspace over nearby shops to be converted to residential use.

3.0 Site Description and Context

The site is located on the south side of Openshaw Way, which runs broadly parallel to Leys Avenue and which generally serves as a service road to the retail, commercial and residential premises on Leys Avenue.

There is a gradient change across the site, with the Openshaw Way frontage being lower than the site and buildings on the Leys Avenue (south) side.

The site is located within the Letchworth Garden City Conservation Area; Nos. 56-58 Leys Avenue makes up part of a Grade II Listed Building.

The architectural context of this part of Openshaw Way is varied, although it would be fair to say that it comprises a succession of comparatively newly-built and utilitarian rear extensions to the buildings on Leys Avenue – there is in other words no consistent architectural character or quality.
Being set in an elevated position, the original rear walls of the buildings fronting Leys Avenue are partially discernible and comprise a mixture of render and brickwork with multi-pane casement windows under clay-tiled roofs.

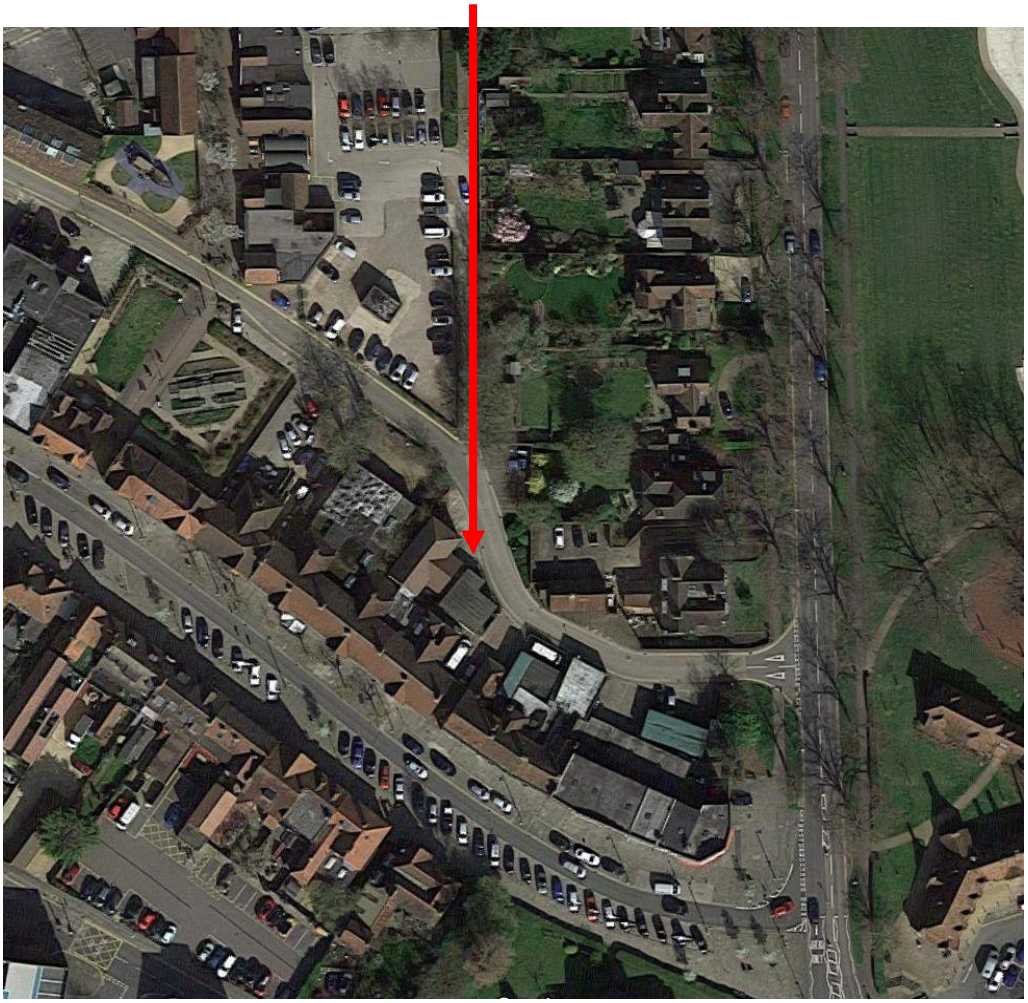
The opposite side of Openshaw Way comprises a mixture of car parking areas, rear gardens to the properties on Norton Way South and various trees.

The buildings on Leys Avenue are a mixture of two and three storeys and combine elements of Arts and Crafts and Art Deco influenced architecture, again with render finishes, red brick and red-brown tiled roofs.

Photographs below illustrate the existing building and its context:



Aerial Views





View from North-East



View from North



Rear of No. 58 Leys Ave.



Space between site and rear of No. 56 Leys Ave.

4.0 Proposal & Design – Brief Outline

It is proposed to demolish the existing building and to construct a two-storey building with rooms in gabled and hipped roofs. The building would be divided into two 2-bedroomed properties and one 1-bedroomed property.

4.1. Plans:

The proposed footprint remains as exists now.

Principal rooms would be set on the Openshaw Way side.

The proposed ground floor accommodation occupies the complete footprint, with external areas of landscaped space.
The proposed first floor accommodation occupies the complete footprint, but includes a covered verandah overlooking Openshaw Way.
The proposed second floor accommodation is smaller, and occupies the roofspace, with a combination of dormers, rooflights and gable windows providing light and views across Openshaw Way.

4.2. Accommodation Summary:

The proposed building is two-storey, with rooms in the roof. Rooms on the second floor are built into the vaulted roof-space, in order to reduce overall height and massing.

A summary of accommodation of each of the three proposed dwellings is:
Unit 1 – Ground : Kitchen-Living-Dining room, Bedroom 1, Bedroom 2, Bathroom
Unit 2 – First : Kitchen-Living-Dining room, Bedroom 1, Bedroom 2, Bathroom
Unit 3 – Roof : Kitchen-Living-Dining room, Bedroom 1, Bathroom

4.3. Heights & Massing:

The existing building is 3.7m in height (above ground level on the Openshaw Way elevation).
The ridge of No. 58 Leys Avenue is approximately 10.9m above this same level.
The eave of the rear projection to No. 58 is approximately 6.4m above this level.

The ridge of the proposed building is 8.3m above this level, and the upper and lower eaves 6.4m and 5.3m respectively.

The proposed roof pitch is similar to that of the existing surrounding buildings in order to create harmonious proportions and angles in the various adjacent roofs. A gable end is proposed to the south-east elevation, in order to correspond with the large end gable to No. 58, but also to create viable space within the second floor unit.
The proposed gable and hip roof features are comparable in scale to that of the neighbouring buildings. In other words, the height, massing and three-dimensional character of the proposed building and existing neighbours would appear cohesive, deliberate and comfortable.

4.4. General Design Principles:

The applicant wishes to create a building of quality, in terms of design and material, which echoes the character of the architecture within the Conservation Area and which enhances the character of buildings in Openshaw Way.

Reference has been made to local precedents, in the form of the original buildings in their unaltered state.
Many of these buildings share a robustness in terms of scale, proportion, material and detail.
Similar philosophies of simple forms with good proportions and the enjoyment of high-quality material are built into these proposals.

A series of common design and material elements are:
- Roofs of bold pitch, with clay tile finishes
- Brickwork of good quality with elements of three-dimensional detail
- Render finishes to enhance lightness
- Windows which are located with specific regard to the interior as well as the exterior
- A degree of symmetry and a degree of deliberate asymmetry

4.5 Light and Orientation:

The proposed dwellings would obtain their best light from the Openshaw Way frontage.

The spatial arrangement and orientation of the proposed building is such that no overshadowing to the detriment of neighbours will result.

5.0 Specific References to relevant parts of North Herts District Council's Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations 1996 & North Hertfordshire Draft Local Plan 2011-2031

Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations 1996:

Policy 8 - Development in Towns:
The proposal accords with the principle of new development taking place in existing towns, encouraging the re-use of urban land to avoid neglect and dereliction.
The proposal would provide a long-term usage for a piece of land and property no longer required for its previous use – improving efficiency in the use of the land rather than perpetuating previous use.

Policy 18 - Listed Buildings:
No modification is proposed to the Listed building itself (54-58 Leys Avenue).

Policy 20 - Conservation Areas:
The proposal would maintain and enhance the character of the Conservation Area.
The existing building, to be demolished, is not important to the visual quality or historic integrity of the CA and its loss would not adversely affect its character.
The proposal respects and reflects the visual quality of the area, through its design, materials, colour, form and scale.

Policy 21 - Landscape and Open Space Patterns in Towns:
Although of small size, the proposed landscaping features of the proposal would make a positive contribution to the streetscape as well as being of amenity to the occupants.

Policy 26 - Housing Proposals:
The proposal is located within a residential area in the sense that there are flats of a comparable size within the vicinity, albeit generally above commercial premises.
The proposed change of use would not affect the core commercial premises (Leys Avenue itself) and would be acceptable in land use and environmental terms.
The proposal would involve de minimis loss of land from existing employment use.

Policy 27A - Flats over Commercial Property:
Although not sited over commercial property, this proposal could be said to share the characteristics of premises for which this policy is intended.
The proposal would not conflict with other policies in the Plan and would achieve a satisfactory living environment in the newly created properties.

Policy 43 – Shopping Areas in Town Centres:
The proposal would not disrupt the local shopping pattern. The existing use is ancillary to the use of the shops on Leys Avenue (as storage and occasional display) and is no longer required, reflecting the scaling-back of trade and stock held.

Policy 55 - Car Parking Standards:
The required car parking standard is five spaces. The site is not of a sufficient size to accommodate any car parking. However, the applicant owns other property within the immediate vicinity and can meet this provision within forty metres of the site.
(Refer to application drawing SLP/01).

Policy 57 – Residential Guidelines and Standards:
The design of the proposal has involved consideration of the proposed building itself (internally and externally) as well as its setting.

Site and surroundings:
The proposal protects the environmental character, in the immediate vicinity and more broadly.
It is sensitive to the scale of surroundings and the material traditionally used in the locality.

Design and Layout:
The proposal is of small scale. However, the design and layout is functional and practical, at the same time as incorporating small scale design features which would elevate the proposal above the norm.

Roads and Footpaths:
The pedestrian approach to the properties would be via the existing pathway approach to properties over Nos. 54 and 56 Leys Avenue.

Mix of Dwelling Sizes:
The three units proposed would each be of slightly different sizes, meeting the needs of different individuals.

Floorspace:
The proposal is of limited size, but individual spaces are not shoehorned in. The total space and individual room sizes would meet reasonable requirements of occupants and exceed government space standards.

Orientation:
Reasonable levels of sunlight and daylight would be achieved, in fact all rooms would receive an unusually high natural light level, through mixed use of windows, dormers and rooflights.
(On this subject – and with regard to neighbouring buildings – the windows to the rear of No. 56 and 58 Leys Avenue, in front of which the building would be built, serve ancillary office and storage space and are secondary windows. The proposal would not therefore detrimentally affect the amenity of neighbouring occupants).

Privacy:
The proposed rear elevation contains only three windows; these would be obscure-glazed and of limited opening.
There are no buildings opposite on Openshaw Way.

Play, Amenity Space & Landscape:
The site is too small to provide public amenity space. However, small amenity spaces are proposed to two of the units, on ground and first floors.
The applicant suggests that the degree of space afforded would be representative of that sought by the expected occupants. There are as mentioned above public park spaces within the immediate vicinity.
The amenity space provided would be sufficient to create a soft surround for the building itself, avoiding too hard an urban setting for domestic life.

Noise:
The noise generated externally by motor traffic is low, reflecting the comparatively low usage and speed of traffic on Openshaw Way.

Car Parking:
As mentioned above, the applicant is to provide parking to meet required standards off-site, within forty metres of the site boundary.

Servicing:
The site is readily accessible and easily serviced by statutory undertakers, emergency services, delivery and refuse collection. Joint facilities for telecommunications apparatus would be provided.

Policy 58 – Letchworth Garden City Design Principles:
The applicant believes that the proposal is in sympathy with the traditional buildings of Letchworth and takes into account the Garden City Design Principles.

4.12 The existing building might be said to be an example of 'un-planned development', meaning that it fulfilled a solely utilitarian function, relating to historic needs of a particular retail premises.

The proposal on the other hand is more in keeping with the design principle of the Garden City; it integrates into its context and relates architecturally to the established building on Leys Avenue.

3. The proposed building would form a positive insertion into the vista seen from the Openshaw Way/Norton Way South junction (see photograph below):



5. The stepped plan and the adoption of hips and gables would provide a varied accent building within the streetscape.

8. & 9. The design, layout, scale, material and colour of the proposal would blend with the established character.

Part 5 Policies & Proposals, Letchworth:

5.4.2 An increase in appropriately designed residential accommodation would contribute to revitalising the town centre; residents bring with them the need for immediately local shops and facilities.

LTC4 The proposal would support and strengthen activity in the town centre, and strengthen commercial and community activity.

NPPF2 – Ensuring the vitality of town centres:
As mentioned above, even a small increase in residential usage supports viability and vitality of the town centre.
The proposal would not be to the detriment of the shopping premises on Leys Avenue; the space used is now surplus to requirements.
The proposal would support economic activity in the immediate vicinity.

NPPF7 – Requiring good design:
58. The proposal would add to the quality of the area over the lifetime of the development, being a sustainable use of the site.
A sense of place would be created, through provision of an attractive building in which to live.
The proposal would optimise the use of the site and would promote mixed use, to the benefit of local facilities.
The proposal responds to local character and history and reflects the identity and material of its surroundings.
The site would provide a safe and accessible environment for domestic life.
The applicant believes the proposal to be of good quality architecturally and to include a level of landscaping which would enhance the building's setting.

60. The proposal would promote and reinforce local distinctiveness.

63. The proposal would raise the standard of design in this part of Openshaw Way, to the benefit of the older buildings of a higher standard retained in the immediate vicinity.

65. The proposed use would be sustainable and it would not have a detrimental impact upon heritage assets or their setting, or the townscape more widely.

NPPF12 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment:
The proposal would sustain and enhance the environment in which it is located.
The viability and sustainability of usage would conserve the local environment.
The development would make a positive contribution to the local character.

The buildings on Leys Avenue are architecturally significant (and Nos. 52-58 are Grade II Listed – see detail below in italics). The proposed building would have no detrimental effect upon these buildings or their setting; in fact it would make a positive contribution, reinforcing and enhancing character and reflecting scale, detail and material.

For reference, 52-58 Leys Avenue was listed 07 September 1979, list entry number 1101996

Details: LEYS AVENUE 1. 5255 Nos 52 to 58 (even) TL 2132 8/67 TL 2232 9/67 II GV 2. 1909 by Allen Foxley. Parade of shops with living accommodation above. Two storeys. Symmetrical facade with 3 projecting pedimented entrance bays. Fenestration 1:2:2:2:2:2:1. Tiled roofs with brick stacks. Roughcast walls with brick dressings and pilaster strips on quoins. Three-light, transom and mullion casement windows with glazing bars; entrance bays with paired oriel windows. Arched entrances flanked by brick pilasters. Central pediment with ornamental plasterwork incorporating the date 1909.

NHDC Local Plan 2011-2031:

Policy SP1 – Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire:
The proposal makes use of previously developed land.
The proposal supports growth and would provide an opportunity for new residents.
A mix of homes would be delivered.
The proposed development, although minor, would be of high quality, respecting and improving its surroundings.
The proposal would protect adjacent heritage assets.

Policy SP2 – Settlement Hierarchy:
The proposal is within the centre of Letchworth Garden City and would therefore enhance use of existing facilities, social networks and infrastructure.

Policy SP8 – Housing:
The site is within pre-existing settlement limits.

Policy SP9 – Design and sustainability:
The applicant believes that the proposal is well designed and responds positively to its context, making the most of an opportunity to improve the character and quality of its surroundings.
The proposed use is sustainable and meets the government's new homes standards.

Policy SP13 – Historic Environment:
The setting of adjacent heritage assets would be retained, preserved and enhanced.

Policy T2 – Parking:
Policy requires the proposal to provide five parking spaces for residents. The site is not of a sufficient size to accommodate car parking. However, the applicant will provide spaces off-site, within forty metres of the site. (Refer to application drawing SLP/01).

The applicant seeks a relaxation of the requirement for visitor parking, as publicly available off-street parking is available within two minutes' walk of the site (almost opposite in Openshaw Way (50 metres), and at the Hillshott/Norton Way South junction (130 metres)).

Policy HS3 – Housing Mix:
The size of proposed dwellings is appropriate taking into account the location and accessibility of the site and the expectations of likely occupants.
The proposal provides a density, scale and character of development which is appropriate to its location and surroundings.

Policy D1 – Sustainable Design:
The proposal responds positively to the site's local context. Specifically, the proposed massing, layout and fenestration relate directly to neighbouring and facing buildings.

The proposal enhances the public realm of Openshaw Way, through improvement of usage and occupancy.

Subject to post-planning detail, the proposal will be designed to reduce energy consumption and waste.

New planting is proposed, where currently there is none.

The location of the proposed dwellings maximises accessibility and connectivity through its central position.

The proposal exceeds DCLG Technical housing space standards. Water efficiency standards would be met or exceeded during the detailed design phase.

Consideration has been given to the design and construction of the proposed building in terms of sustainability and its environmental impact.

Post-planning design would determine the exact environmental standard of the building, but design to this date has ensured various environmental characteristics and features:

~ General Design:
- Efficient form and layout
- Low openings (doors, windows, rooflights) to floor area ratio
- Low surface area to volume ratio
- 'Room in the roof' construction

~ Materials/Installations:
- Natural materials with low embodied energy – brick, clay, natural render, timber
- Heavily insulated

~ Land use:
- Previously developed site
- Previous land use known - no land contamination

~ Waste:
- Encourage the use of recycled, recyclable and durable products

~ Energy:
- Maximise energy conservation in building
- High level of insulation, draft-proofing, localised temperature controls
- Encourage energy efficient modes of transport - proximity to public transport and facilities, bicycle storage
- Minimise energy use during construction - traditional methods, minimised changes to site levels

~ Air, water, noise and light:
- Minimise water consumption
- Protect the hydrology of the site - permeable surfaces
- Minimise noise - high level of insulation, hours of construction

~ Safety:
- Minimise opportunities for crime through the layout of buildings and spaces.

~ Aesthetics:
- Integrate well into the surroundings - levels to reflect site contours, appropriate massing, natural materials reflecting local character
- Take opportunities to improve the street scene or appearance of the area

Policy D3 – Protecting living conditions:
The proposed dwellings would not be negatively affected by any existing adjacent uses, these being a mixture of retail, office and residential premises.
The proposal has been designed with regard to the amenity of neighbours, in order to remove risk of loss of light, noise and overlooking.

Policy HE1 – Designated Heritage Assets:
As mentioned above, the site is located within the Letchworth Garden City Conservation Area and is situated behind a Grade II Listed Building.

The listed buildings are not affected by the proposal.

The setting of the listed building is considered to be enhanced by the demolition of the existing building and the erection of a new building designed to be in harmony with the listed building in terms of scale, massing, detail and material.

6.0 Access

The site is within a thoroughly sustainable location, with easy access to local facilities and public transport (buses and rail).

The wide variety of shops, post office, churches, restaurants, etc of LGC are immediately nearby.

Various public recreational spaces exist nearby, most obviously Howard Park on the other side of Norton Way South (65 metres).

The site is not subject to flood risk.

7.0 Pre-Application Consultations

An application for pre-application advice was lodged in March 2017 relating to proposed change of use and residential developments to the rear of 54-72 Leys Avenue.

Though at that time proposing a larger form of development, the positive findings and advice provided have influenced the generation of these proposals and the content of this document specifically.

On 15th November 2017, the applicant met briefly with Mr R Tiffin, Area Planning Officer NHDC. It was suggested that proposals should be modified to reduce massing of the proposed building. Subsequent amendments to the form of the roof and the volume of the smaller unit within have enabled a reduction in overall massing.

On 19th January 2018, the applicant met with Mr G Fisher, CEO of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, together with Mr M Coles, Head of Property Services of LGCHF to discuss developing proposals.
Two schemes were tabled. The first was a three-storey proposal (containing three two-bedroomed properties), with a flat roof in order to minimise massing. The second was effectively as contained within this application – a building of smaller massing with a more traditional pitched roof design.
The positive feedback received has prompted this application; the content of which is unchanged other than by the provision of fuller information and description.

8.0 Summary

The proposed building is modern in terms of its use of space, at the same time as being traditional in terms of its external design.

The applicant considers that the proposed building would create an addition to the streetscape of quality, which has been designed to preserve the amenity of immediate neighbours and to preserve and enhance the fabric and setting of adjacent heritage assets.

The applicant considers that all relevant planning policies are met by the proposal.

Accordingly, we trust that this application may be viewed favourably.