North Hertfordshire District Council
Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 18/01111/LBC
Date: 24/09/2018
Planning Officer: SD
Address: Fats 8A, 8B and 8C Upper King Street, Royston SG8 9AZ
Subject: Internal alterations to three existing first and second floor residential units to create 2 x two bedroom and 2 x one bedroom flats.

I previously commented under application ref: 12/01267/1LB on 05/07/2012 for 'Internal alterations and two first floor infill extensions to facilitate conversion from 3 flats to 6 flats on the first and second floors'. Clearly this scheme is for fewer units when compared with that of the 2012 scheme and does not involve first floor infill extensions.

This application, together with its 'sister' planning application (ref: 11/01615/1) and other applications, are indexed under address no. 13 High Street, Royston i.e. the frontage property. It would be helpful if all planning history can be seen against the one address or failing that a note on Uniform to say that both addresses should be considered.

Application ref: 12/01267/LBC was refused LBC for the following reason:

The alterations proposed and including the first floor infill extensions would result in the unnecessary removal of historic fabric including: sections of walls, panelled doors and an 8 over 8 possibly C19 sliding sash window and would harm the existing more open floor plan arrangement in particular to Flat 2, which currently allows the character of the spaces to be more fully appreciated. The light wells provide a valuable source of natural light onto three staircases and provide limited views of the building's form and roofscape, thereby, enabling a fuller appreciation of the listed building's character. The loss of natural light would harm the internal character of the listed building. As such the proposal would fail to satisfy Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and as supported by the NPPF.

The above decision was not appealed.

No.13 High Street is grade II listed and located within Royston Conservation Area (Designated Heritage Assets in terms of the NPPF). The list description refers to:

Late C18, top floor added late C19. Red and grey brickwork, tiled roof. 3 storeys, 1st floor central bow window. Included for group value.

Although it is clear that the listing principally relates to the three-storey building fronting High Street, a two-storey (probably C19) gault brick building with tiled roof exists and faces onto Upper King Street and appears to have the postal address of 8 Upper King Street. Interestingly, the rear part of the building was described in a Building Survey Report supporting the 2012 application as follows:

".... The two-storey part of the side elevation appears to have originally been of timber frame construction dating from the 18th century...externally the frame clad with apparently single leaf 100mm gault brick....the rear elevation appears to be of 225mm solid brick, except that it may incorporate a few timber posts ...."

Had the later gault brick section not formed an integral part of no.13 High Street, there may have been a case to suggest that this would not have been listed in its own right but the fact that the two are inextricably related, I address the proposal in terms that the whole building is listed but place moderate significance at best on to the rear range.

It is noted that a Heritage Justification Statement has not been submitted in support of either of the current applications meaning that the proposal is currently contrary to 'Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets' of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Proposed Submission, October 2016) which is set out as follows:

Planning applications relating to Designated heritage assets shall be accompanied by a Heritage Assessment/Justification Statement that:

i. Assess the significance of heritage assets, including their setting, impacted by the proposal;
ii. Justify and detail the impacts of any proposal upon the significance of the designated asset(s); and
iii. Inform any necessary mitigation measures to minimise or mitigate against any identified harms;

Planning permission for development proposals affecting Designated Heritage Assets or their setting will be granted where they (as applicable):

a. Enable the heritage asset to be used in a manner that secures its conservation and preserves its significance;
b. Incorporate a palette of materials that make a positive contribution to local character or distinctiveness, where it is appropriate and justified.

Unit 1
This is the smallest of the four units and is presumably intended to be a 1 person/1 bedroom flat which I understand should be no less than 37m² ? I suggest that the reference to 'alternative shower room' is omitted from drawing no. 12981-P003-1st.

Unit 2
This unit is only achievable by removing at least 3no. 2-panelled doors (two panel door type commonly found throughout the C18 - 1740-50 but these may possibly be later), stud wall, and a dog-leg stair of low/moderate significance. Having said that, in functional terms it works well as a larger 1 bedroom unit although the kitchen unit space is minimal and probably relying upon the additional space provided in the modest utility. There is also a concern that with the number of windows to the bedroom and the position of the entrance corridor that there is very little space for wardrobe space in the bedroom apart from immediately behind the bedroom door and forego one bedside cabinet.

Unit 3
Whilst this may appear to be a well-planned 2-bedroom unit, there are good reasons for maintaining the status quo i.e. keep the kitchen in its current location and maintaining the living/dining room as a relatively generous space considering that the kitchen proposed in this space is minimal and would require additional plumbing and venting. In my opinion the current proposed layout would harm the main living space and there is no convincing justification to change the layout other to win an additional bedroom and enhance the conversion value of the property.

Unit 4
This unit requires a similar amount of intervention to the first floor as that required to form Unit 2. In addition, however, sections of lath-and-plaster walls at second floor would also need to be removed to facilitate the reconfigured interior at the top of the new stairs including the creation of the bathroom. Although headroom is relatively low and may require the ceiling to be raised, there is a case to suggest that the bathroom could be relocated into the 'attic' space which would leave part of the existing kitchen stud wall intact both enlarging Bedroom 2 and perhaps providing an alcove for a wardrobe(s). There would be a residual area i.e. where the bath is currently shown, which would then nether be in Bed 2 or in the bathroom, however, if the top part of the staircase had a balustrade then the small window on the side elevation could provide natural light at the top of the stairs. Justification is required as to why the attic space cannot be used for this purpose. I also question as to whether it would be better to locate the kitchen to Unit 4 onto the wall dividing this room from Bed 1 to perhaps improve the entrance into the main living space i.e. kitchen units located behind the door. There is a case to suggest that the new staircase could, in fact, make a positive contribution to Flat 4. The fact that the second floor was added in the late C19, I attach moderate significance to this additional floor and the staircase which provides access to this floor.

Suggested conditions

1. All two-panel internal doors capable of being salvaged shall be retained on site and reused in the conversion unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Details as to any upgrade required for fire purposes together with details where the salvaged doors would be located shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the alterations hereby consented.

   Reason: To safeguard the listed building's special character.

2. Details of all mechanical ventilation/extraction from kitchens and bathrooms shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the alterations hereby consented.

   Reason: To safeguard the listed building's special character.

3. Details of any floor/wall/ceiling insulation proposed for either thermal, fire protection or acoustic reasons shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the alterations hereby consented.

   Reason: To safeguard the listed building's special character.

Recommendation
The alterations proposed would result in the removal of some historic fabric including: sections of walls, panelled doors and a staircase and no justification has been provided in support of this scheme. Currently, the proposal is, therefore, contrary to Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Proposed Submission, October 2016).

Furthermore, it could be said that the three existing flats provide an optimum viable use for the upper floors of this listed building. If, therefore, it is considered that harm would be occasioned to the listed building then a case that this would secure an 'optimum viable use' for the upper floors could not be made. This would appear to be an exercise in purely seeking an uplift in the value of this heritage asset by achieving

an additional unit. As the scheme currently stands I advise that the extent of harm would be sufficient to merit an **OBJECTION**.

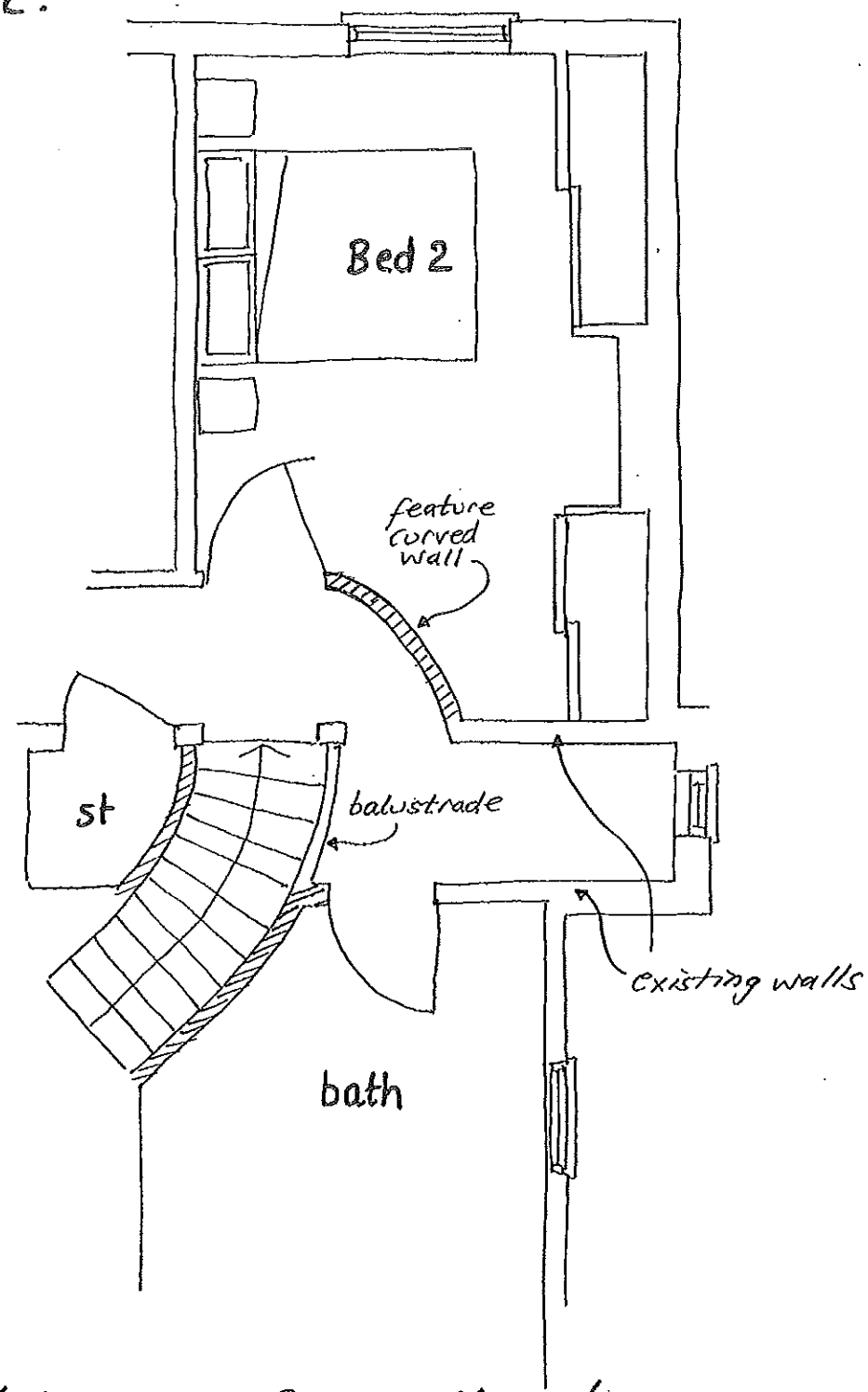
However, subject to receiving feedback regarding suggested changes, I may be minded to conclude that the alterations would not occasion sufficient harm to elements of the building's special character to justify a refusal but in order to satisfy the provisions of Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Section 16 of the NPPF further work is necessary in terms of justification and alterations proposed.

If changes are made, then I advise that the description is amended to read as:

Internal alterations to facilitate conversion of 3no. existing first and second floor residential units into 3 x 1 bedroom first floor flats and 1 x two bedroom second floor flat.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer

Ref: 18/01111/LBC.



Alternative Second floor Layout.

for discussion purposes.
M. Simmons
24 Sept 2018.