

HERITAGE STATEMENT

10 HIGH STREET, HITCHIN, SG5 1BH

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Heritage Statement has been prepared on behalf of Tesco Stores Ltd (the applicant), in support of an application for the installation of a new plant solution at 10 High Street, Hitchin, SG5 1BH.
- 1.2. Full planning permission is sought for the installation of a new plant solution, comprising 1x new packaged refrigeration unit to be installed at flat roof level, and 3x new floor mounted AC units surrounded on three sides by a protection rail to be installed at flat roof level.
- 1.3. The remainder of this statement is set out as follows:
 - Section 2 outlines the site and surroundings including the relevant heritage designations;
 - Section 3 sets out the relevant planning policy context;
 - Section 4 details the proposal considerations against the relevant planning policy and heritage context; and
 - Section 5 provides a conclusion.

2. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1. The application Site consisting of the ground floor unit at 10 High Street 1-5 is currently vacant but was formerly occupied by M&Co. The Site is located directly opposite a vacant unit, with the predominant land use in the surrounding area being retail and commercial. This includes multiple restaurants, business outlets and retail stores along the High Street. Neighbouring premises consist of a Boots, a Vision Express opticians and a Fussey & Baer coffee shop. The Site is understood to have been most recently occupied by M&Co and prior to this as a Woolworths.
- 2.2. The application Site is located in the Hitchin Conservation Area. The nearest listed building is the Grade II listed 22 High Street (List Entry Number: 1347589) located opposite.
- 2.3. The Site is located within the Primary Shopping Frontages (ETC4) and Mixed Use Allocations (SP4, ETC3) areas, as per the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (2022).

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- 2.4. The Hitchin Conservation Area: Character Statement (2011) provides insight into the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area, in addition to identifying negative features where improvements would be welcome.

3. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1. The following planning policy documents are of relevance to the site:

- North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (2022);
- Hitchin Conservation Area: Character Statement (2011); and
- The National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (2022)

- 3.2. With regards to the design of development proposals, 'Policy D1: Sustainable design' of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 states:

"Planning permission will be granted provided that development proposals:

a) Respond positively to the site's local context;

b) Take all reasonable opportunities, consistent with the nature and scale of the scheme, to:

- i. create or enhance public realm;*
- ii. optimise the potential of the site by incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS);*
- iii. reduce energy consumption and waste;*
- iv. retain existing vegetation and propose appropriate new planting;*
- v. maximise accessibility, legibility and physical and social connectivity both internally and with neighbouring areas;*
- vi. future proof for changes in technology and lifestyle;*
- vii. design-out opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour; and*
- viii. minimise the visual impact of street furniture and parking provision;*

b) Have regard to the Design SPD, and any other relevant guidance..."

- 3.3. With regard to the design of development affecting designated heritage assets, 'Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets' states:

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“Planning applications relating to Designated heritage Assets or their setting shall be accompanied by a Heritage Assessment/Justification Statement that:

- i. Assesses the significance of heritage assets, including their setting;*
- ii. Justifies and details the impacts of any proposal upon the significance of the designated heritage asset(s); and*
- iii. Informs any necessary 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; and*
- c) Will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, and this harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the development, including securing the asset’s optimum viable use.*

Where substantial harm to, or loss of significance, of a designated heritage asset is proposed the Council shall refuse consent unless it can be demonstrated that the scheme is necessary to deliver considerable public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss.”

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- 3.4. The NPPF is an additional material consideration. It is underpinned by a presumption in favour of sustainable development and in terms of that presumption, paragraph 11 states that for decision taking this means ‘*approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay...’*.
- 3.5. With respect to heritage, the Site falls within a conservation area and is located in close proximity to a number of listed buildings. The NPPF states the following in respect to the impact of development on designated heritage assets:

“212. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be).

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This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.”

Hitchin Conservation Area: Character Statement (2011)

- 3.6. The Hitchin Conservation Area Statement sets out the historic context of the Hitchin Conservation Area and details the specific aesthetic qualities of the area. The guidance states that details characteristic of the area should be retained and repaired wherever possible.

- 3.7. The guidance states the following regarding the character of the High Street area

“This Character Area once formed part of the large marketplace to the west of St Mary’s Church which was gradually encroached over, so that now the church is no longer visible from the High Street or from Bancroft, described by the architectural historian Sir Nicholas Pevsner as one of the best streets in of Hertfordshire. The street is wide and between Market Place and the junction with Brand Street, where High Street becomes Bancroft, has been subject to an environmental improvement scheme which provided a partially pedestrianised street. The uses are all commercial with residential uses above some of the shops. This is the major shopping area of Hitchin with national chains being represented. On-street short stay car parking is a useful shoppers’ facility, but does encourage circulating traffic looking for free parking – this can lead to pedestrian and vehicular conflict. These issues were identified by stakeholders in relation to the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan that has been endorsed by Hertfordshire County Council’s Highways and Transport Cabinet Panel...”

The proposed works are considered against the above context in the next section of this letter.

4. PROPOSALS AND HERITAGE CONSIDERATIONS

Proposals

- 4.1. Full planning permission is sought for the installation of a new plant solution. The description of development is proposed to read as follows:

“Installation a new plant solution.”

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- 4.2. Additional information on the proposal is available on the proposed plans, submitted as part of this application.

Considerations

- 4.3. As noted earlier in this statement, full planning permission is sought for the installation of a new plant solution, consisting of 1x new packaged refrigeration unit to be installed at flat roof level, and 3x new floor mounted AC units surrounded on three sides by a protection rail to be installed at flat roof level.
- 4.4. The Site is located along Hitchin High Street, a highly commercial area featuring numerous retail sites with associated plant.
- 4.5. The proposed plant has been designed so as to not obscure the elevational design nor any architectural features of the building and will not be visible from the High Street.
- 4.6. It is therefore concluded that the proposal for the installation of a new plant solution will have no harmful impact upon the character and appearance of the conservation area nor adversely impact any nearby Listed Buildings.
- 4.7. Ultimately, it is concluded that the proposed works will not harm the character of the conservation area in which the site lies, nor of any nearby listed buildings, in line with the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (2022) and the NPPF (2024).
- 4.8. Moreover, even if some very low level of harm was found (which is not considered to be the case on the basis of this assessment), it is considered that the benefits provided by improved ease and access of the retail unit would outweigh this minimal harm.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1. This Heritage Statement has been prepared to support the proposal for full planning permission for the installation of a new plant solution.
- 5.2. The proposal has been considered with regards to local planning policy, local context, and historical context.

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- 5.3. It is considered that the proposed works will not harm the character of the surrounding conservation area nor of any nearby heritage assets.
- 5.4. On this basis, it is concluded that the proposal should not be refused on heritage grounds.