

Supporting Statement for Prior Approval Application

Change of Use from Office (Use Class E) to Residential (Use Class C3)
First Floor, 3–4 Portmill Lane, Hitchin, SG5 1DS

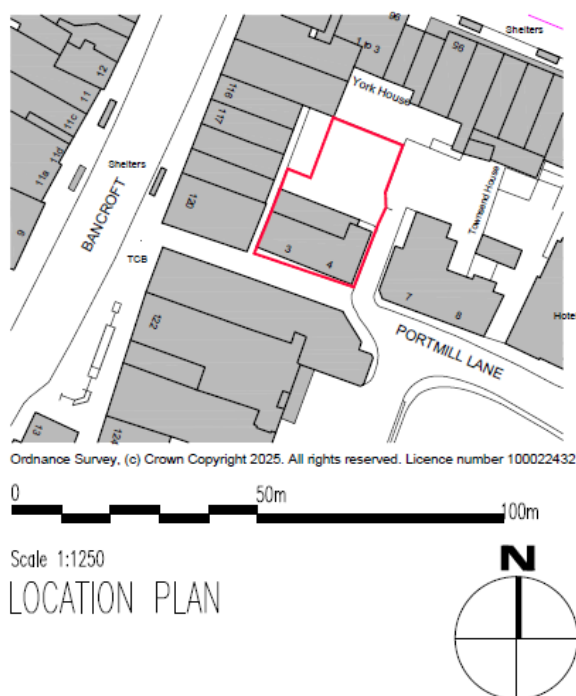
1. Introduction

This statement supports a Prior Approval application under Class MA, Part 3, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, as amended.

The proposal seeks consent for the change of use of the first floor of 3–4 Portmill Lane from office use (Class E) to residential use (Class C3) to provide three self-contained two-bedroom flats.

The building occupies a sustainable town-centre location in Hitchin, with commercial use at ground-floor level.

The site is located within the Hitchin Town Centre Conservation area. It is also located within the Article 4 direction relating to class MA applications, although this building is not included.



2. Description of Proposals

The scheme will convert the existing first-floor office accommodation to create 3 no. two-bedroom flats.

Key features:

- Existing access retained via the current stairway.
- Internal space standards: all units meet or exceed the Nationally Described Space Standards (minimum 61 m² for a two-bedroom, three-person dwelling).
- Natural light and outlook: all habitable rooms are served by large existing windows providing good daylight and ventilation.
- Refuse and cycle storage: dedicated space is provided within the existing rear yard in accordance with North Hertfordshire District Council's waste and recycling guidance.
- Acoustic environment: the location is generally quiet and suitable for residential occupation.

3 Assessment against Class MA Criteria

Requirement	Compliance
Building in Class E on 5 March 2020	✓ Confirmed – See Section 4
Change of use to Class C3	✓ Proposed
Gross floorspace under 1,500 m ²	✓ Complies
Not listed or within SSSI, safety hazard or military area	✓ Complies
No ground-floor frontage in a protected retail parade	✓ Complies
Adequate natural light to all habitable rooms	✓ Complies – generous windows
Contamination, transport, and noise impacts	✓ Acceptable in this town-centre setting – refer to site plan
Flood risk	✓ Site in Flood Zone 1 (see below)

4. Use and Vacancy

Evidence of recent occupation and current vacancy at 3–4 Portmill Lane, Hitchin

Evidence source	Summary of information	Relevant date(s)	Notes
Hitchin Investments	Purchased property	October 2025	Current owner
AEW UK REIT plc – Acquisition Announcement	AEW confirmed purchase of the freehold property (including 3–4 Portmill Lane) describing the office element as vacant at acquisition.	14 March 2025	Confirms current vacancy at the date of sale.
Fortem Solutions Ltd	Listed in official procurement record (Contracts Finder) and multiple business directories with address 3–4 Portmill Lane, Hitchin SG5 1DJ.	c. 2018 – 2022 (listing dates)	Demonstrates prior office use by a commercial occupier.
Citydoc Medical Ltd (uncertain)	Appears in some business directories referencing Portmill Lane; Companies House shows registered office later moved to 5 Portmill Lane (03 May 2022).	2021 – 2022 (approx.)	Presence at 3–4 unconfirmed – treat as indicative only.
Commercial property listing (LoopNet)	Marketing brochure describing 3–4 Portmill Lane as an office building available to let/sell.	2020	Confirms use and marketing as office accommodation.

The above evidence confirms that the building at 3–4 Portmill Lane has a long-established lawful office use (Class E), formerly occupied by Fortem Solutions Ltd until at least 2022 and subsequently marketed as office space in 2020.

The most recent owner, AEW UK REIT plc, confirmed in March 2025 that the office element was vacant at the time of purchase.

Accordingly, the property satisfies both the two-year qualifying period in office use and the minimum three-month vacancy requirement, thereby meeting the relevant provisions of Class MA.1(b)–(c) of the GPDO.

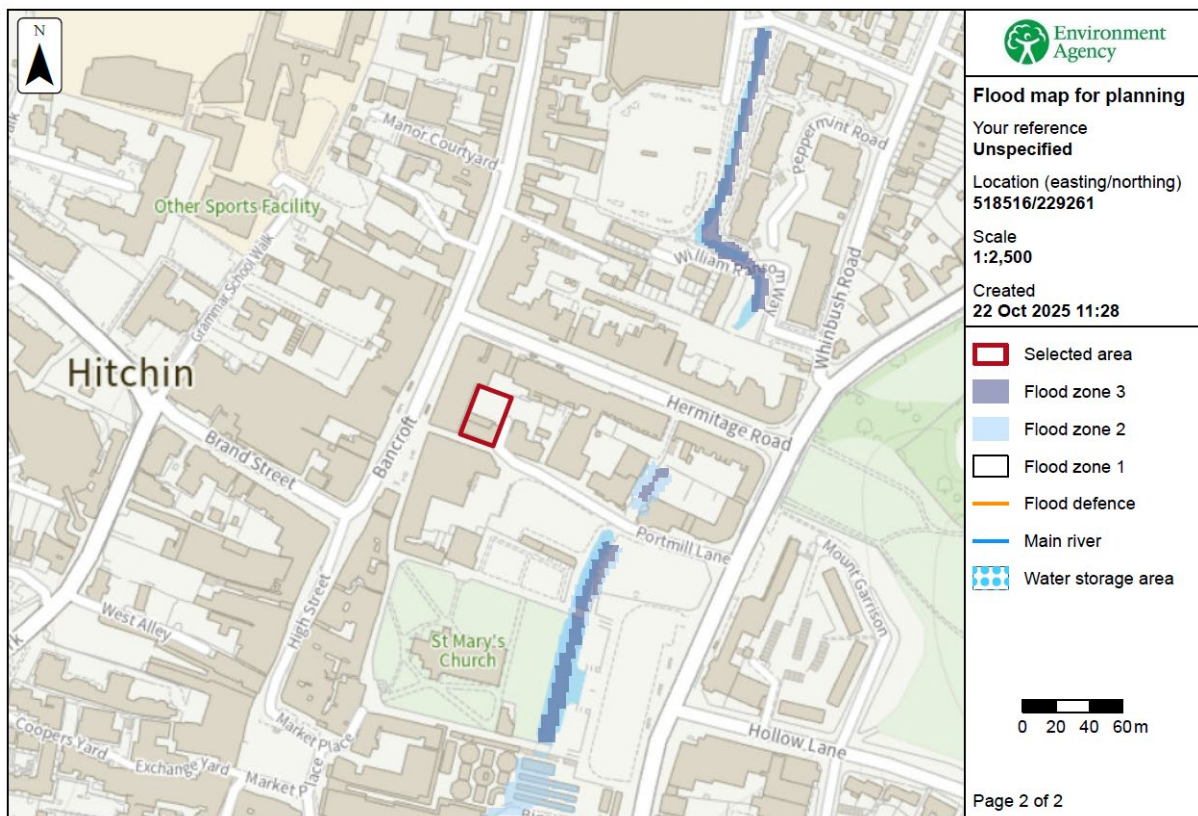
5. Flood Risk

According to the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning, the site lies entirely within Flood Zone 1, meaning it is at low probability of flooding from rivers or the sea (less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability). See the enclosed report.

A review of the Environment Agency's Flood Risk Assessment for Planning (Rivers and Sea) and long-term flood risk data confirms:

- The site is not at risk from surface water or groundwater flooding.
- Even allowing for climate change projections to 2070–2125, the site remains outside areas anticipated to flood.
- The development is limited to the first floor of the existing building, providing further resilience.

Accordingly, the proposal satisfies the requirements of Class MA.2(2)(f), as the location is considered appropriate for residential use with no need for further flood mitigation measures.



6. Noise

The site is mostly quiet and tranquil, with limited numbers of pedestrians passing during the day. A noise assessment is being carried out and will be provided when available.

7. Transport, Access, Refuse and Servicing

The existing entrance and circulation arrangements will be retained. Cycle storage and refuse facilities are provided within the existing rear yard, with level access to the highway for collection.

The councils requirements are for:

- 90L per flat for dry recycling
- 80L per flat for paper and card recycling
- 80L per flat for residual waste storage
- 20L per flat for food waste

Given the highly sustainable location—close to public transport, shops, and services—no dedicated on-site car parking is proposed.

8. Conclusion

The proposed conversion of the first floor of 3–4 Portmill Lane from office (Class E) to residential (Class C3) fully complies with the provisions of Class MA.

The scheme will deliver three high-quality, well-lit two-bedroom flats in a sustainable and low-risk location, making efficient use of existing urban floorspace and supporting housing delivery in Hitchin town centre.

It is therefore respectfully requested that the Local Planning Authority grants Prior Approval for the proposed change of use.

APPENDIX A – ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS



Extract from NHDC's map of Article 4 Direction for Hitchin Town Centre. 3-4 Portmill Lane is not an address covered by this.