PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

On behalf of

Loungers Limited

In respect of the change of use from Use Class A1 (Retail) to Use Class A3 (Café/Restaurant), the installation of extraction system and shop front alterations

At

21 Brand Street, Hitchin, SG5 1JE

D2 Planning Ref: 064/18

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1. ‘Loungers’ Marketing Brochure

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This planning statement has been submitted on behalf of Loungers Limited (the applicant) in support of an application for planning permission for the change of use from Use Class A1 (Retail) to Use Class A3 (Café/Restaurant), the installation of an extraction system and shopfront alterations at 21 Brand Street, Hitchin, SG5 1JE.

1.2. This report should be read in conjunction with the accompanying documents which include:

i)	Existing and Proposed Plans and Elevations	(Drawing No. LNG3859.01G)
ii)	Extraction System Plan	(Drawing No. RP66455)
iii)	Extraction System Section	(Drawing No. RP66456)
iv)	Site Location Plan	(Drawing No. RC-21BRND-02)

1.3. Following this introduction, the Statement goes on to describe the site and surrounding area, relevant planning history as well as a description of the proposal. Section 5 will then outline the relevant adopted and emerging planning policy context, and the proposals will be assessed in this context in Section 6.

1.4. Conclusions will be drawn in support of the proposals in Section 7. These will show that there is a robust case to indicate that the scheme would not harm the vitality and viability of the Hitchin Town Centre, and that significant benefits could be accrued for the local economy.

2. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

2.1. The property is located on the Northern side of Brand Street running through the town centre of Hitchin.

2.2. The site is not locally or Nationally listed however it is situated within a Conservation Area, and Flood Zone 1.

2.3. The premises are located in a highly sustainable and accessible location. Local bus services run along Bancroft, Bedford Road and Queen Street, with a number of bus stops located within easy walking/cycling distance to and from the site.

2.4. Access into the application site is via the main shopping street, Brand Street, and is serviced to the rear off Grammar School Road.

2.5. No off street parking is provided for the unit itself however there is short stay parking directly outside on Brand Street. There are also a number of car parks in close proximity to the site within walking distance. These are Brand Street car park and Lairage Multi Storey car park. Hitchin Railway Station is also an 8 minute bus journey away or a 17 minute walk at a distance of 0.9 miles.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

3.1. In December 1977 advertisement consent was refused for the erection of individual illuminated letter on front elevation.

3.2. Planning permission was granted in October 1979 for alterations to existing building form enclosed storage area.

3.3. Advertisement consent was given in December 1980 for an internally illuminated fascia sign.

3.4. In April 1989 planning permission was granted for new front entrance doors and replacement windows.

3.5. Advertisement consent was given for an illuminated projecting box sign and internally illuminated door fascia sign to reflect existing in March 1990.

3.6. In June 1990 advertisement consent was granted for an internally illuminated projecting box sign.

4. PROPOSAL

4.1. The proposal seeks the change of use of 21 Brand Street from retail (Use Class A1) to a café/restaurant (Use Class A3), the installation of an extraction system and external alterations.

4.2. The proposal would have a net internal trading floor area of 164.5sqm on the ground floor and 36.5sqm metres of external trading floor area.

4.3. Proposed external alterations include the recess of the shopfront to create an external seating area within the original building footprint. The new timber framed shopfront would be set back from the front of the building to form a covered external trading area. A ramp would be installed to accommodate the change in level.

4.4. Advertisement consent will be applied for in a separate application if permission for the change of use is forthcoming.

4.5. Loungers Limited is a food and drink operator with a focus on the Continental-in-style café/bistro concept, creating an informal and neighbourhood food-led café/restaurant open all day every day where family, friends, and local residents can meet, eat and drink in a relaxed and comfortable environment. There are also a variety of board games available together with daily newspapers to read and a free neighbourhood book swap facility. The marketing brochure (Appendix 1) expands on the ethos of the Loungers Limited brand.

4.6. Conceptually, all of Loungers Limited's operations are similar in terms of location, within suburban areas with strong shopping characteristics. The café/restaurants seek to compliment the main retail function of the area rather than detract from it.

4.7. Loungers Limited now have over 100 outlets nationwide. These outlets are almost entirely patronised by local residents and do not rely upon or seek to encourage business from further afield. As a consequence the vast majority of customers travel on foot.

4.8. The target client group results in an all seater facility with the focus of operation on food. Whilst there is a selection of beverages including wine and beer, the sales data for other Lounges indicate that the split is in favour of food (further details are included within the Marketing Brochure, attached as appendix 1). There is no takeaway service.

4.9. There would be no amplified music within the premises and appropriate ventilation, extraction and sound insulation measures would be provided. The hours of opening would be 08:00 until 23:30 Sunday to Wednesday and 08:00 until 00:30 Thursday to Saturday.

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy

5.1. National planning policy is encompassed in the National Planning Policy Framework, published in March 2012. Local Authorities are required to take its contents into account when preparing their Development Plans and also when making decisions on planning applications and appeals.

5.2. It sets out in a comprehensive document the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for the country and requires that the planning system must play an active role in guiding development to sustainable solutions (paragraph 8).

5.3. A presumption in favour of sustainable development is central to the NPPF (paragraph 14). It states that without economic growth a sustainable future cannot be achieved. A set of 12 core principles are set out in paragraph 17 which, amongst other things, seek:

- Planning should proactively drive and support the sustainable economic development that this country needs making sure that every effort is made to identify and meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area.
- Planning policies and decisions should make effective use of land and encourage multiple benefits for the use of land.
- Planning policies and decisions should actively manage patterns of growth and make fullest use of public transport, walking, cycling etc.
- Seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.
- Support transition to low carbon future in a changing climate, including encouraging the use of renewable resources.

5.4. Section 2 refers to the need for recognising town centres as the heart of communities and ensuring their vitality. It seeks to promote competitive town centres through the provision of customer choice and a range of suitable uses reflecting the individuality of the centres.

5.5. Section 4 sets out the Government's guidance in respect of transport. It recognises that quality of life and sustainable development depends on transport and easy access to

jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services. It stresses the need for a safe, efficient and integrated transport system, balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes giving people real choice.

5.6. Section 7 relates to design aspects of development and Paragraph 56 states that

> **"Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is indivisible from good planning."**

5.7. Policies and decisions should ensure development functions well and adds to overall quality of the area, create attractive places to live, optimize the potential of the site, respond to local character and

> "**Reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation."**

5.8. Paragraph 60 continues:

> **"Planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles."**

It encourages weight to be given to designs that raise the standard of design more generally in the area, and also advocates that planning permission should not be withheld for development which promotes high levels of sustainability due to concerns about incompatibility with existing townscape if good design incorporated.

5.9. Section 12 relates to the need of conserving and enhancing the historic environment and paragraph 132 states that:

> **"Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear convincing justification.**

Development Plan

5.10. This section sets out the relevant planning policy context for the proposal. The Local Plan currently comprises of the saved Policies from the District Local Plan. Since 1996, the district's planning policies have been contained in the District Local Plan No.2 with alterations. Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, those policies expired on 27 September 2007, except for those that were given permission from the Secretary of State to endure beyond this date. That permission has been granted of 33 of the policies.

5.11. Following the publication of the NPPF in March 2012, policies in the Local Plan need to be considered alongside those of the NPPF. Policies which are inconsistent with the NPPF will have less weigh applied to them.

District Local Plan No.2 with Alterations

5.12. Whilst work is underway in preparing a new Local Plan to replace the 1996 document, The Saved Local Plan September 2007 is currently used for determining planning applications. Policies relevant in the determination of the proposals are discussed in detail below.

5.13. **Policy 43: Shopping Areas in Town Centres**

Within town centre Shopping Areas, the Council will permit development proposals:

i. Within Shopping Frontages, normally only if the proposal is for retail use on the ground floor (A1 Use Class)

ii. Elsewhere within Shopping Areas

   a. For retail uses and eating/drinking places on the ground floor (A1 and A3 Use Classes) or

   b. For other uses if it can be shown that the proposal will not disrupt the shopping pattern and will attract people to the centre or it is above ground floor level does not mean a loss of a dwelling; and

iii. Only if the environment aims of the Local Plan are met, particularly in Conservation Areas (Policy 20 no longer exists), for shopfronts (Policy 45) and for advertisements (Policy 46 no longer exists).

5.14. **Policy 45: Shopfronts**

For shopfronts, the Council will normally require the retention of existing ones where their architectural or historic interest, or design, relates well to their surroundings. The Council will only permit alterations or replacements if:

i. Any published design advice is adhered to
ii. The design is in sympathy with adjacent shopfronts, with particular regard to fascia lines, stall riser heights, glazing, bay widths, materials and colours
iii. The design also respects the scale, character and construction of the building and appropriate adjoining buildings in the street scene
iv. The fascias do not extend up to or above first floor window sills
v. The fascias are not so deep as to be out of proportion with the building and adjoining buildings
vi. The fascias have a common depth on individual buildings serving two or more shopfronts
vii. The fascias have different depths on buildings with different architectural styles
viii. The proposal meets the aims of Policy 18 –Listed Buildings, and Policy 20 – Conservation Areas (no longer exists) where applicable.

Hitchin Town Centre Strategy

5.15. Hitchin Town Centre Strategy was adopted by Full Council on 18 November 2004. It comprises an overall vision with aims and policy guidance.

5.16. The overall vision for Hitchin's Town Centre is:

"To maintain the quality of the built environment based on its intrinsic historic character, and to develop an attractive, safe, accessible, vibrant and lively town centre for the local community and visitors to shop, work and live in."

5.17. Some of the key aims to achieve this are:

- Ensure long term economic sustainability and viability of the town centre
- Promote a balanced mix and diversity of land uses within the town centre that contribute to its vitality and local distinctiveness
- Make the most efficient use of land, buildings, energy, water and waste

5.18. **Policy 7**

The council will encourage:

(a) The retention and improvement of shopping in the core of Hitchin town centre and,

(b) Other measures to attract customers and investors whilst enhancing its local character and identity.

The Council will support appropriate regeneration including redevelopment and environmental enhancement, a mix of land uses outside the shopping core including housing.

5.19. **Policy 9**

The Council will encourage and approve proposals for the appropriate location of food and drink and leisure uses in the town centre, at street level or above, that will actively contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre and not to the detriment of primary shopping frontages or the amenity of local residents.

5.20. **Policy 11**

The Council will undertake regular "health checks" of the retail economy in accordance with the guidelines set out in PPS6. These will be used to assess the vitality and viability of the town centre and monitor the effectiveness of policies in the Council's LDF. It is envisaged that monitoring of uses in the town centre will be undertaken annually.

Town Centre and Retail Monitoring

5.21. The Annual Monitoring Report 2015-2016 is the fifth Annual Monitoring (AMR) which North Hertfordshire District Council has produced on Town Centre and Retail uses. The basis of much of the information contained in the report is a survey of town centre units in the four main town centres: Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston.

5.22. The report shows a net loss of 89sqm of retail floorspace and a 932sqm gain of Café/Restaurant space. The existing floorspace in town centres is shown in the table below:

Use	**M^2**	**%**
A1	105,499	47.1
A3	13/117	5.9

Proposed Submission Local Plan 2011-2031

5.23. The new Local Plan will replace the 1996 Local Plan. It will cover the period 2011-2031 and will set targets for new homes, employment and retail development, and identify areas of land where these developments should be built.

5.24. Cabinet approved the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan in September 2016. Public consultation ended on 3th November 2016. Full Council approved the submission of the plan for examination on 11 April 2017.

5.25. The Plan is currently being examined by an Inspector and therefore cannot currently hold any weight in the determination of this application.

5.26. The following section assesses the proposals against the relevant policies detailed above, in order to demonstrate the proposals accord with the relevant policies of the Statutory Development Plan.

6. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

6.1. There are a number of key issues in relation to the determination of the proposed development as follows:

i) Whether the proposed A3 Use is acceptable;

ii) Whether the design would preserve or enhance the Conservation Area and local area;

iii) Benefits the proposal would bring.

6.2. These issues are discussed in detail below:

i) Whether the proposed A3 Use is acceptable;

6.3. The proposals map to the Local Plan identifies the premises within the Hitchin Town Centre. As such the following policies area relevant in the determination of the proposals.

6.4. **Local Plan Policy 43** states that within Town Centre Shopping Areas. The Council will permit development proposals for retail uses and eating/drinking places on the ground floor (A1 and A3 Use Classes). The environmental aims of the Local Plan need to be met particularly in Conservation Areas, for shopfront and for advertisements.

6.5. Some of the key aims of the **Hitchin Town Strategy** are:

- Ensure long term economic sustainability and viability of the town centre
- Promote a balanced mix and diversity of land uses within the town centre that contribute to its vitality and local distinctiveness
- Make the most efficient use of land, buildings, energy, water and waste

6.6. **Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Policy 7** states that

The council will encourage:

(c) The retention and improvement of shopping in the core of Hitchin town centre and,

(d) Other measures to attract customers and investors whilst enhancing its local character and identity.

The Council will support appropriate regeneration including redevelopment and environmental

6.7. **Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Policy 9** states that the Council will encourage and approve proposals for the appropriate location of food and drink and leisure uses in the

town centre, at street level or above. That will actively contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre and not to the detriment of primary shopping frontages or the amenity of local residents.

6.8. **Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Policy 11** states that the council will undertake regular health checks of the retail economy which will be used to assess the vitality and viability of the town centre.

6.9. **The Annual Monitoring Report 2015-2016** shows that retail is the dominant use within the town centres at 47.1% of units falling under Use Class A1. In comparison only 5.9% of units fall within Use Class A3.

6.10. The proposals comply with this criteria as follows:

i. A1 and A3 uses are both defined as acceptable development within the town centre shopping area outside of the Primary shopping frontages as defined in Local Plan Policy 43. Therefore, the principle of an A3 use in this location is acceptable in principle.

ii. Whilst the number of restaurants have increased and number of retail units have decreased, given the percentages of the land uses stated in the Annual Monitoring Report 2015-16 it can be identified that the units within Hitchin Town Centre is comprised predominately of retail units with limited café/restaurant provision. The proposals would thus enhance the diversity and the mix of uses to the ground floor of the town centre and enhance the eating experience, something which is encouraged in Local Plan Policy 43 and Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Policies 9 and 11.

iii. The change of use would bring an empty unit back into use adding to the vibrancy and vitality of this part of the Shopping Area.

iv. Although set back, the existing shopfronts will remain maintaining an active frontage at ground floor level.

v. The operational hours of the Loungers would cover and exceed all of the traditional hours of 9am-5pm bringing footfall into the area during the day and evening.

vi. The premises are located in a highly sustainable and accessible location. Local bus services run along Bancroft, Bedford Road and Queen Street, with a

number of bus stops located within easy walking/cycling distance to and from the site.

vii. There will continue to be sufficient A1 (retail) units on Brand Street and the proposed A3 (Café/Restaurant) unit has significant benefits which outweigh the loss of this A1 Use. The change if use would enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre by occupying the empty unit. The restaurant would increase the restaurant provision on Brand Street and bring further footfall into the area. The shopfront will remain and the restaurant would have an active frontage throughout the day time and evening.

6.11. In view of the above, the proposal would comply with Local Plan Policies 43 and Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Policies 7, 9 and 11.

ii. Whether the design would preserve or enhance the Conservation Area and local area;

6.12. The building is situated within the Hitchin Conservation Area. Local Plan Policy 20 used to deal with development in Conservation Areas however this no longer exists. As such, the following policies are relevant.

6.13. **Local Plan Policy 45** states that for shopfronts, the Council will normally require the retention of existing ones where their architectural or historic interest, or design, relates well to their surroundings. The Council will only permit alterations or replacements if:

i. Any published design advice is adhered to
ii. The design is in sympathy with adjacent shopfronts, with particular regard to fascia lines, stall riser heights, glazing, bay widths, materials and colours
iii. The design also respects the scale, character and construction of the building and appropriate adjoining buildings in the street scene
iv. The fascias do not extend up to or above first floor window sills
v. The fascias are not so deep as to be out of proportion with the building and adjoining buildings
vi. The fascias have a common depth on individual buildings serving two or more shopfronts
vii. The fascias have different depths on buildings with different architectural styles
viii. The proposal meets the aims of Policy 18 –Listed Buildings, and Policy 20 – Conservation Areas (no longer exists) where applicable.

6.14. The proposals comply with this criteria as follows:

i. The existing shopfront consists of timber and glazing. It has no architectural or historical interest and therefore it is not necessary to retain the current shopfront. Furthermore it appears dated given planning consent was granted in 1989 for this particular shopfront.

ii. The proposal includes the installation of a new shopfront set back from the front of the building to form a covered external seating area.

iii. The shopfront will be timber framed with siding/folding doors either side with top lights above.

iv. The adjoining properties to the North West (New Look and Argos) both have recessed frontages. These are large units which dominate the frontage of this block therefore the proposal will be in keeping with its surroundings.

v. The application proposes a new fascia sign to be installed in the position of the existing. At this stage the proposal includes the board only with details of signage to be submitted under a separate application.

vi. An external DDA ramp will also be installed to accommodate the change in level.

vii. The extraction ductwork will be installed to the rear elevation at first floor level. An air intake grille will also be installed at high level to the rear elevation.

viii. None of the above will not be visible from the front of the building, and will therefore not have a detrimental visual impact on the street scene or wider Conservation Area.

6.15. In view of the above, the proposals would comply with Local Plan Policies 45.

iii. Benefits the proposal would bring

6.16. There are a range of benefits associated with the proposed development which need to be taken into account and be given due weight in the planning balance. These include:

- The provision of an A3 Use which would enhance the provision of eating and drinking establishments in the town centre;
- The provision of an active frontage complementing the vitality and viability of the retail character of the town centre;

- A significant investment into the area; and
- The provision of a number of full and part time jobs.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1. The proposal is for the change of use from Use Class A1 (Retail) to Use Class A3 (Café/Restaurant), the installation of extraction system and shopfront alterations at 21 Brand Street, Hitchin.

7.2. The applicants have demonstrated that the proposed A3 Use would contribute to the long term vitality and viability of Hitchin town centre. The proposed Loungers would keep an active frontage along Brand Street and would generate footfall throughout the day and evening due to the proposed opening hours 09:00-23.00 Sunday to Wednesday and 09:00-00:00 Thursday to Saturday. This complies with Local Plan Policies 43 and Hitchin Town Centre Strategy Policies 7, 9 and 11.

3.7. According to the Annual Monitoring Report 2015-16 Hitchin Town Centre comprises predominately retail units, with limited restaurant/café provision. Accordingly, the proposals would enhance the diversity and mix of uses along Brand Street and within the Town Centre.

3.8. The external alterations proposed reflect the character of the adjoining units consisting of a recessed shopfront with glazing and timber framing. Therefore the development would not cause any detrimental visual harm to the street scene or the Conservation Area. The extraction details will also be situated to the rear of the building and will not be visible from the street scene.

3.9. Furthermore, the premises are located in a highly sustainable and accessible location. Local bus services run along Bancroft, Bedford Road and Queen Street, with a number of bus stops located within easy walking/cycling distance to and from the site.

7.3. There are also a range of benefits associated with the proposal which include:

- The provision of an A3 Use which would enhance the provision of eating and drinking establishments in the town centre;
- The provision of an active frontage complimenting the vitality and viability of the retail character of the town centre;
- A significant investment into the area; and
- The provision of jobs.

7.4. In view of the above, it is considered that a proper assessment of the proposal reveals that it complies with the relevant national and local planning policy and that planning permission should be granted.

APPENDIX 1

Loungers Marketing Brochure