

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	25/02250/LBC & 25/02278/AD
CASE OFFICER:	HT
APPLICATION SITE:	Church House, 32a Kneesworth Street, Royston, Hertfordshire, SG8 5AB
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Erection of two signs on the front walls of the property (development already carried out).

RECOMMENDATION:

I raise an **OBJECTION** to ref: 25/02278/AD for the following reason:

By reason of their size, location (unconventional plinth wall positions), materiality (over-laminate aluminium board) and predominantly light blue colour, the signs have a strident assertive impact on the entrance to Church House (the former United Reformed Church – grade II). The signs also have an erosive impact upon the wider setting of other listed buildings nearby and affect the appearance of the Royston Conservation Area. The less than substantial harm identified is towards the low end of the harm continuum and there are no public benefits to offset this harm and an optimal viable use exists. The signs fail to satisfy the provisions of Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on listed building's special character and the character and appearance of Royston Conservation Area

The proposal will have some impact upon the setting of listed buildings and the appearance of the RCA and will occasion harm to both types of heritage asset.

SITE CONTEXT:

The former United Reformed Church, Church House, 32A, Kneesworth Street is grade II listed and is located in the Royston Conservation Area. Both the building and the conservation area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF. The list entry is found at the following link:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1347642?section=official-list-entry>

To the south stands 32 Kneesworth Street - see link below:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1102043?section=official-list-entry>

and to the north is The Rookery (no.34) – see link below:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1174685?section=official-list-entry>

Nos 28 to 36 (even), Yard Wall to No 36 and No 36A form a group with the former United Reformed Church and Nos 1 and 3 Lower King Street.

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Prior to these applications being received I gave internal advice to the Planning Compliance Team. At the time I treated the front boundary treatment as potentially curtilage-listed i.e. constructed before 1st July 1948.

There is an image within the Francis Frith Collection that shows the boundary treatment to the former United Reformed Church in 1929 and shows a pair of ornate metal gates set between low straight plinth walls on either side i.e. not a chamfered vehicular entrance. No chamfered entrance is shown on the late 1940's OS map extracts below.

Cambridgeshire Sheet LVIII.SW
Revised: 1946 to 1948, Published: 1950



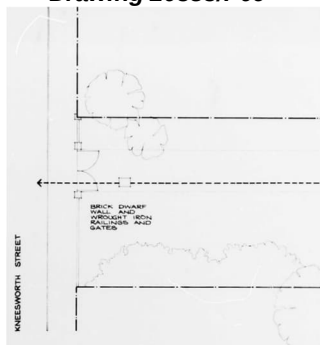
Hertfordshire Sheet IV.NE
Revised: 1947, Published: 1950



With permission from the National Library of Scotland

After delving into the planning history I came across the following drawings under ref: 83/01695/1 for 'COU of former church to architect's studio' granted on 8 December 1983. Although an application for listed building consent was submitted at that time (ref: 83/01696/1LB), there is no commentary on this file relating to boundary treatment so I assume that the front boundary was not considered to be a curtilage-listed matter.

Drawing 20383/P09



Drawing 20383/P10 Rev B



The above explains why under ref: 95/000075/1 pursuant to an unauthorised entrance archway why a former Conservation Officer referred to the entrance as having been modified. **With the above in mind, I conclude that the front boundary walls/railings/gates should not be considered curtilage-listed and that application ref: 25/02250/LBC should be withdrawn.**

25/02278/AD

I have assessed the advertisement application based upon its impact on the setting of nearby listed buildings and upon the character and appearance of the Royston Conservation Area. The supporting statement dated 5 September 2025 refers to the applications having been submitted on behalf of Orchard Day Nursery Ltd and respond to a request from Enforcement officers to address breaches of planning control at the site (24/00038/1ENF). The statement confirms that two signs affixed to the front gates have been removed (which is welcomed).

Generally, there is an assortment of signs in this part of the RCA as one might expect in an urban centre and the following provides an indication of what exists on the west side of Kneesworth Street



Inspecting images on Google Maps below there is evidence of various signage on the plinth walls subject of this application over the last 13 years although in 2021 there was only a small sign on the right-hand splay.

Aug 2008



July 2017



May 2021



The first nursery advert appears on Google Maps in April 2023. The supporting statement states the following:

The Proposed Development

These applications are for the retention of two small low-level signs advertising the nursery which are affixed to the walls each side of the entrance. The first (Sign 1) is on the chamfered southern wall to replace a previous sign (seen in the above photo). The second sign (Sign 2) is positioned on the northern wall facing the street.



Sign 1



Sign 2

Firstly, I would not necessarily regard these signs as 'small'. Next, colours are subjective and in this particular case, the solid light blue background colour coupled with the duplication of relatively large signs does result in a rather strident arrangement at the access to this site which is flanked by grade II listed buildings. If two signs are proposed I would be seeking signs of at least half their current length. Better still, I advise that they are removed and replaced by a single twin-post-mounted sign placed in front of the hedge screen but behind the railing, thereby expressing the brickwork. This may be similar to the aforementioned Francis Frith Collection image which appears to show a notice board when the church was used in the 1920's.

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:**Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:**

Sections 66(1) & 72(1)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

Policy HE1

NPPF (December 2024):

The following paragraphs are relevant:

- **135 c)** (*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment*),
- **207** (*local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting*)
- **210** (*desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*),
- **212** (*great weight should be given to the asset's conservation*),
- **213** (*clear and convincing justification*), and
- **215** (*harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use*).

CONCLUSION:

The proposal is considered unacceptable.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 11/11/2025