

# North Hertfordshire District Council

## Building Conservation comments

**File Ref:** 24/01975/FPH & 24/01976/LBC

**Date:** 25/10/2023

**Planning Officer:** TR

**Address:** 5 Croft Lane, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 1AS

**Subject:** Two storey side and single storey rear extension following demolition of existing detached garage. Detached garden store. Internal works. (as amended by plan nos. 301A, 302A & 306A received 21st October 2024).

Before commenting further, I suggest that the descriptions are slightly amended to read as:

- **24/01975/FPH** – Two-storey side and single-storey rear extension (incorporating black solar panels to single-storey roof) following demolition of existing detached garage. Detached garden store (as amended by plan nos. 301A, 302A & 306A received 21st October 2024).
- **24/01976/LBC** – Two-storey side and single-storey rear extension (incorporating black solar panels to single-storey roof) following demolition of existing detached garage. Internal works (as amended by plan nos. 301A, 302A & 306A received 21st October 2024).

You will see that I have included reference to the solar panels, omitted internal works from the planning application (only requires LBC) and omitted the garden store from the LBC application (only requires planning permission).

Nos. 5 & 7 Croft Lane are grade II listed and are located in the Croft Lane (Letchworth) Conservation Area. The buildings and the area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF. The building is described as follows and was added to the Statutory List on 04.07.1997:

*A pair of semi-detached cottages. 1905-6 with late C20 alterations and additions. By Geoffrey Lucas, architect. Roughcast walls on a brick plinth, plain tile roof covering and 2 brick ridge stacks with decorative capping courses. PLAN: linear range with weatherboarded offshut to front forming back-to-back entrance porches. EXTERIOR: front (south) elevation; one-and-a-half storeys, 3 bays, with central weatherboarded lean-to offshut, flanked by 4-light side-hung casement windows with glazing bars, one to each cottage. Offshut has 2 small 4-pane pivot windows, and doorways in the returns, No.7 (right) with original plank door and frame. First floor with 3 wide gabled dormer windows, with weatherboarded apexes. The centre dormer is shared and has coupled 2-light casements. The outer dormers have tripartite casements, arranged 1:2:1, the central lights fixed. The rear of No.7 has a late C20 conservatory. INTERIORS: No.5 retains original fittings, including plank doors with contemporary ironmongery, a winder stair with plain balusters, and fitted bedroom cupboards. The cottages were built in the earliest phase of development of the Letchworth Garden City, and clearly demonstrate, by means of their size, plan form and detailing, the aim of providing affordable small-scale housing. Geoffrey Lucas was awarded the prize for the grouped cottages category in the Cheap Cottage Exhibition of 1905, organised to demonstrate how affordable housing could be provided for the rural worker.*

On 11.08.1997 the owner at no.7 applied for a single-storey rear and two-storey side extension which was granted planning permission (97/00967/1HH) and listed building

consent (97/00968/1LB) on 30.10.1997. The extension is therefore not mentioned in the list entry but the C20 conservatory is.

### **The Local Plan and NPPF**

Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 is relevant as are the following paragraphs of the NPPF:

- **200** (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)
- **203** (desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
- **205** (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
- **206** (clear and convincing justification), and
- **208** (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

### **Background**

I previously commented on a scheme on 3 August and 1 December 2023 for 'Two storey side and part single, part two storey rear extension following demolition of existing detached garage. Internal works.' under refs: 23/01328/FPH & 23/01329/LBC.

As stated in the list entry no.5 is one half of a pair of semi-detached cottages and were built in the earliest phase of development of the Letchworth Garden City, and clearly demonstrate, by means of their size, plan form and detailing, the aim of providing affordable small-scale housing for the rural worker at the turn of the last century. At 2.13 of the Croft Lane (Letchworth) Conservation Area it states: ***Numbers 5-7 Croft Lane (1905-06) (NHLE 1245306) by Geoffry Lucas are in roughcast brick over a brick plinth with casement windows and plain tile roof, and are notably similar in style to some of his other buildings in Letchworth, for instance the '£150 houses' at Paddock Close, and Hampstead Garden Suburb.***

The following is referenced from Wikipedia online:

*Thomas Geoffry Lucas (6 June 1872 – 3 October 1947), generally known as Geoffry Lucas, but often found incorrectly spelt as Geoffrey Lucas, was a 20th-century English architect. He is perhaps best known for his work in connection with the garden city movement, but was also active in other areas, including the design of churches and church fittings.*

*In 1903, in partnership with Sydney Cranfield, Lucas entered the competition for designs for a garden city at Letchworth which would make a reality of the ideas of Ebenezer Howard. The competition was won by Richard Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, but the design submitted by Lucas and Cranfield has been described as "an intelligent and pleasing plan, its main disadvantage being the separation of the north and south residential areas". Nevertheless, Lucas was responsible for the design of some of the houses in Letchworth, notably a group of cheap cottages at Paddock Close which were described as "The £150 House". Of these houses he said, **"Although simple, an effort has been made to obtain dignity, and an architectural treatment, without extravagance"**. Whilst a similarity in style can be seen, their simplicity forms a marked contrast with the more opulent houses which he was designing for private patrons at this time.*

The original cottages, whilst modest in scale and displaying a simplicity of form, have an accomplished and well-handled architectural treatment without extravagance - a trait of some of Geoffry Lucas' garden city work. Due to the configuration of the site for both nos.5 and 7 and the frontage site boundary, there is a clearer view of no.5 when compared with no.7 and from the driveway of which there is a clear view of the

building's appearance and built form as can be seen in the comparison of the Google Maps image (Nov 2012 below right) and the earlier image on the front cover of the applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement (below left).



In my professional opinion, the side extension to no.7 does not make a particularly positive contribution to the building's special character with a similar ridge height and unbalancing impact of the smaller dormer. This addition was added shortly after listing.



Interestingly, on 5 September 2000, listed building consent and planning permission (00/01050/1LB & 00/01051/1HH respectively) were submitted for a two-storey rear extension following demolition of conservatory at no.7. The case officer wrote the following and expressed a similar view to my own regarding the side addition at no.7:

**File /Reference:** 00/01051/1 **Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> August 2000

**Subject:** Two storey rear extension following demolition of existing conservatory.

**Planning Officer:** Alan Breckon

**Address:** 7 Croft Lane, Letchworth

**Policy & Community Comments:**

This property is one of a pair of semi-detached cottages, built by Geoffrey Lucas with regard to the Arts and Craft Style, with vernacular features, detailing and materials. They were built in the earliest phase of development of the Letchworth Garden City. As the list description states 'The cottages clearly demonstrate, by means of their size, plan form and detailing, the aim of providing small scale affordable housing'. The cottages are relatively compact and simple in form, elongated in plan and one room deep with a continuous roof form to create a lean-to, to the front to accommodate the porch. The cottages were built as a single symmetrical form, they share a central dormer and are strongly united. The cottages are situated in the middle of a triangular plot that naturally tapers towards the rear. The rear gardens are therefore rather narrow, particularly with regard to number 7.

Number 7 ~~has~~ already has a two storey addition to one side, which tends to compromise its original form and its relationship with the adjoining property and their shared symmetry. A second addition, as proposed, will further compromise the small scale, form and plan form of this building, which is a key element of its special interest. It will also result in only one original elevation remaining the others being almost fully masked by two storey additions. The unity and overall design of the two attached cottages will also be compromised by the proposed addition.

This proposal will adversely affect the special interest of this listed building and should not be permitted.

**Eleanor Gale**  
Building Conservation Officer.

On behalf of The Letchworth Garden City Society, Alan Lupton wrote:

This application, although described as above, is a considerable extension to an already heavily extended cottage of a semi-detached pair.

This Society was not in favour of the various plans originally submitted in December 1996 and eventually approved and given Listed Building Consent. The extensions built to these consents fill the width of a small plot and, although designed to be in harmony with what was there before, have destroyed the symmetry, character and scale of the house concerned.

To get the consents, the scale of the proposed alterations was reduced by stages, and we are now presented with an extra extension which would give much the same over-development as was originally proposed and refused.

As I wrote before of this location, such a massive extension to a Listed Building would be unacceptable in any case, but is particularly inappropriate to one of a semi-detached pair in a relatively small plot.

We do not think this application should be approved either.

The '2000' applications were refused for the following reason: ***The proposed extension, by reason of its size, position and overall form, when taken together with the extension that has recently been added to the property, would tend to dominate and compromise the small-scale nature and plan form of the building, to the detriment of its character and appearance as a Grade II Listed Building and the unity and overall design of the pair of Listed cottages of which it forms part.***

The similarity with the current scheme at no.5 is the rearward gable projection to achieve a third bedroom.



### The proposal

It would be fair to say that the narrower width of the addition at no.5 with its stepped ridge and no dormer is significantly better than the addition at no.7 but its presence will only serve to further unbalance and accentuate the elongated built form of the host building affecting their appearance as 'small-scale' cottages. Unlike the previously withdrawn scheme the side extension is now designed as a subservient addition with garage doors concealing a kitchen behind.



Previously I took the view that by reason of the amount of floor place proposed, particularly the rear gabled projection with additional rectangular bay to form the kitchen/dining space and the extent of opening-up works to facilitate the enlarged living room, the previous scheme would occasion less than substantial harm to the overall external form as well as the internal plan form of this pair of grade II listed cottage and will result in the loss historic fabric. The previous scheme would dominate and compromise the small-scale nature and plan form of the building particularly when viewed from the rear garden.

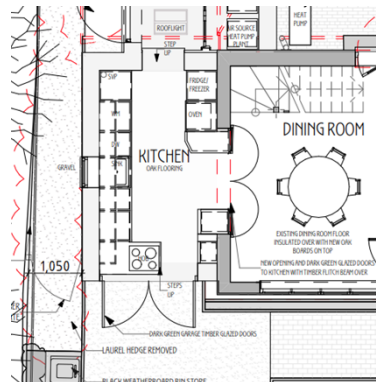
The owner/architect has worked to address these concerns and what is now presented is a more modest linked rear addition with a third bedroom now achieved downstairs.



Although the materials (black corrugated steel roof and walls) proposed for the single-storey addition are different to the rendered parts of the host building, the finish would complement the weatherboarding proposed for the side addition.

This is considered to be a much-improved proposal that respects more fully the cottages special character when compared with the previous submission. The only further question I raise is that of the garage doors and how the kitchen is presented onto the driveway when the doors are open as indicated in the plan extract below.

Having spoken with the owner/architect I understand that the 'garage' doors will be manufactured to a spec consistent with an external wall insulated finish and that there will be no glazed screen or other device between the doors and the kitchen. I am satisfied that this detail is acceptable.



### Suggested conditions.

1. Standard LBC time condition.
2. Details/samples of the clay tiles for the side extension roof shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the development hereby consented. Thereafter the roof shall be covered in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

3. Joinery section details for the windows on the side elevation of the two-storey extension shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter, the windows shall be manufactured in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

4. All 4no. roof lights hereby consented shall be the CR01-2 manufactured by the Rooflight Company unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

5. All new rainwater goods shall be black metal or cast-iron effect unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

6. The opening between the dining room and kitchen shall be formed as per the image at page 6 of the submitted Heritage, Design and Access Statement which includes green-painted glazed doors with an exposed timber lintel above, unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

### **Recommendation**

Paragraph 199 of the NPPF requires that “... **great weight** should be given to the *asset’s conservation....*”. Paragraph 200 states that “... *Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require **clear and convincing justification.***”.

It is considered that the proposal will neither harm the listed building’s special character or harm the character or appearance of the Croft Lane (Letchworth) Conservation Area, thus, will satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC only) 66(1) (FPH only) and 72(1) (both) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and the aims of Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. The proposal is therefore considered to be **UNOBJECTIONABLE**.

**Mark Simmons**  
**Senior Conservation Officer**