

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/02355/FP

Date: 24/01/2025

Planning Officer: HT

Address: The Studio, Manor Farm, Church Lane, Graveley, Herts SG4 7BN

Subject: Replacement of box dormer with two dormer windows on north roof slope and continued use of first floor as one 1-bed studio accommodation.

On 7 February 2023, I provided comment on application refs: 22/02681/PNMA and 22/03006/FPH for 'Conversion of first floor office (use class E) into one 1-bed dwelling (use class C3)' and 'Retention of two dormer windows to existing outbuilding South roof slope and box dormer to North roof slope' respectively. Both applications were withdrawn and not proceeded with. I then provided comment on 29 August 2023 under ref: 23/01101/FP for 'Retention of two dormer windows on south roof slope, box dormer on north roof slope and continued use of first floor as one 1-bed studio accommodation' (appeal in progress).

Local Plan / NPPF (Dec 2024).

Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 is relevant as are following paragraphs of the NPPF are relevant in the consideration of these cases:

- **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).

Planning History

Application ref: 19/02394/FPH for 'Side extension to existing triple garage and insertion of three front and one rear dormer windows. Two front porch extensions and replacement of external staircase' as reproduced below was refused for the following reasons:

RFR1

The proposed extension, by reason of its overly domestic appearance along with the lack of convincing justification for the extension, would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage assets. No justification or public benefits exist that would outweigh this identified harm. The proposed development would therefore fail to satisfy the provisions of Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990, Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (Proposed Main Modifications November 2018).

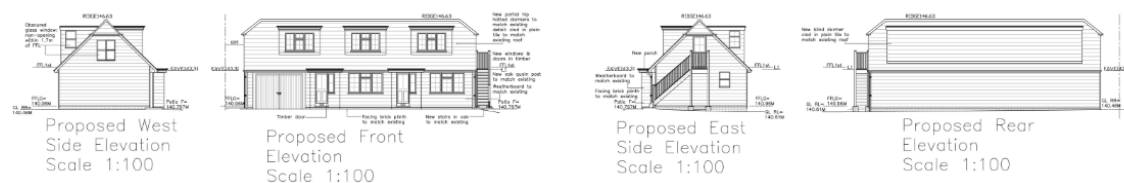
RFR2

The proposed development, by reason of its scale, would result in unacceptable disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. There are no very special circumstances that would outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt by reason of

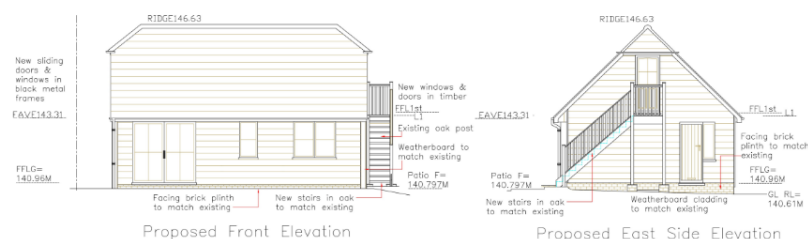
inappropriateness and as such, the proposed development would conflict with Policy 2 of the North Hertfordshire Saved Local Plan (2007), Policy SP5 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (Proposed Main Modifications November 2018) and Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

RFR3

By reason of the proposed developments scale, bulk, size and overly residential appearance within a rural area, the development would amount to disproportionate additions to the original garage building and would fail to remain in keeping with the character and appearance of the area. The proposal therefore fails to comply with Policy 28 of the North Hertfordshire Saved Local Plan (2007), Policy D3 of the North Hertfordshire Plan 2011-2031 (Proposed Main Modifications November 2018) and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).



Under ref: 20/00184/FP, for 'Change of Use and conversion of existing ground floor detached garage to one self-contained 1-bed flat including insertion of ground floor windows and doors on the front elevation. Relocation of existing external staircase (existing first floor use as office accommodation remains unchanged)', the approved amended scheme looked like this - gone are the front and rear dormer windows and side addition.



Under appn ref: 20/00184/FP, a Heritage Statement (Jan 2020) was submitted and was prepared by Dr Valerie Scott (Beams). It acknowledges that *"the impact of the proposed conversion and associated alterations of the garage on the setting of the listed buildings and the SAM must be given great weight in reaching a decision on the application, according to the NPPF paragraph 193"*. The modern garage lies within the setting of Chesfield Manor Farm House and its walled gardens, both grade II listed buildings and the ruin of St Etheldreda's Church is grade II* listed and is also a scheduled ancient monument. This places the church ruins within the category of highest significance.

As stated in the Heritage Statement submitted in 2020:

".....The proposal affects an existing triple garage of the late-twentieth century, located immediately north of the track dividing the site, to the north of the church and the north-east of the house. It has a single storey with an attic, weather-boarded walls, and pitched tiled hipped roofs. The south elevation has three sets of wooden double doors, and the short west end has external steps to an attic door. The east end has a small first floor window, and the north elevation is blank. The north roof slope has three roof lights and the south roof slope is plain. It is a relatively small, low, unobtrusive structure, with a neutral role in the setting of the historic buildings...."

I acknowledge (to an extent) that being on the north side of the track through the site, that the garage is divorced (to a degree) from the historic group. Apart from distance between the garage and the historic group what is also important is the appreciation of the garage within the setting of these heritage assets.

On 18 August 2022, myself and Senior Planning Officer, Peter Bull, attended site and I took the following photos. On 19/10/2022, I reported that the building had not been implemented in accordance with the consented scheme (both ground floor fenestration and the dormers not as approved).



At the time, I had not noted the rear, flat roof dormer which I have subsequently seen in the current case officer's site photographs and which, although shorter, remains similar to the scheme that was refused planning permission in December 2019.



Irrespective of the distances between, the photo below taken when I was on site on 13 January 2025 clearly places The Studio within the setting of Chesfield Manor Farmhouse and the ruin of St Etheldreda's Church which is grade II* listed and is also a scheduled ancient monument (a heritage asset of high significance).



Para 207 of the NPPF states that:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

No Heritage/Planning Statement is submitted with this proposal and the applicant has not described the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.

The streetscene drawing submitted with the application indicates the side elevation of the application building with both the front and rear dormers appearing the same in terms of side elevation only. However, face-on the existing front dormers and the proposed rear dormers are quite different.



The current proposal appears to be an attempt at visually improving the singular box dormer form to read as two pitched roof dormers but more-or-less retaining the existing unauthorised internal layout.

Recommendation

I note that although I offered two detailed reasons for refusal under the previous application, the heritage reason was summarised to the following:

By reason of the lack of a submitted Heritage Assessment and the design and scale of the extensions proposed, the proposed development will occasion harm to the setting of the neighbouring listed building and scheduled ancient monument, thereby, failing to satisfy the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and the aims of Policy HE1 : Designated Heritage Assets, of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

Paragraph 135c) of the NPPF states that decisions should ensure that *“developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting”* whilst paragraph 139 of the NPPF states that *“Development that is not well designed should be refused”*. Great weight has been given to the conservation of nearby assets by carefully considering development within their settings and paragraph 213 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”*.

Once again, I offer a more comprehensive heritage reason for refusal as follows and the degree of harm identified is not equated with a lesser planning objection and is still of considerable importance and weight:

Although not listed, this former garage lies within the immediate setting of Chesfield Manor Farmhouse (grade II listed) and the ruin of St Etheldreda's Church which is grade II* listed and is also a scheduled ancient monument. This places the church ruins within the category of highest significance. By reason of their width and cumulative length together with their height and small-pane windows, the two rear pitched roof dormers would create an unsympathetic, discordant and overtly domestic appearance within what is essentially a former agrarian context, consequently, harming the area's character which includes the aforementioned Designated Heritage Assets and impacting upon their significance. The proposal fails to satisfy the provisions of Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990, Sections 12 & 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024) and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. Although the degree of harm would be low to moderate on the less substantial harm continuum, no convincing justification for the development has been provided and there are no public benefits that would outweigh the harm identified.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer