

TiggColl

9-10 Hitchin High Street

Design & Access Statement
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 9-10 High Street sits within the designated Hitchin Conservation Area, Character Area 2A. The pedestrianised High Street to the south east of the site forms the main retail area within the town, with the listed St. Mary's Church located further to the East. To the north west of the site lies Paynes Park which currently provides the main access to the site.

1.2 The site measures 2775 sqm and it's currently occupied by two retail units with units above, which sit along High Street, and a large car park which occupies the remaining space on the site (indicated with a solid red line). The site is in the heart of the town centre and is currently underused in its current form. The proposal demonstrates how this site can be fully utilised as part of a new development to include both new retail and residential provisions across the site.

1.3 The proposal re-provides retail usage on High Street and improves the overall site through replacing the current raised parking with a high quality residential scheme with parking beneath. A Full Planning Application, providing 44 residential units formed of a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom apartments suitable for a highly accessible town centre location is proposed.

1.4 PowerHaus Consultancy refer to the key planning policies raised by the proposed development in the separate Planning Statement, together with a Heritage Statement to consider the site's contribution to the historic environment, character and sense of place important to Hitchin. Further Consultant reports and statements accompany this reports.



2.0 Existing Site

2.1 The site is located in the centre of Hitchin, a market town in North Hertfordshire.

2.2 It is a large, but long site, bound on the East and West boundaries by Paynes Park (A505) and High Street respectively. The rear of stores back onto the site to the North together with a listed cottage and a number of small parking areas separated by a vehicular pathway. Along Paynes Park to the North is a modern residential building – Poppy House – built close to the boundary. Along High Street to the South is a listed public house, previously named ‘The Cock’ which has a carriageway entrance leading to a private rear garden, commonly utilised during daytime hours as a semi-public through-way. The rest of the southern boundary is occupied by a car park.

2.3 The site and surrounding area has a mix of architectural styles and features, with an architectural influence of Tudor and mock-Tudor features. Combined with this are early-modernist buildings, reconstructions and modest modern additions. Traditional features are more prominent on the High Street, which feature Tudor, Victorian and Georgian elevations. The majority of buildings range from two to four storeys.

2.4 The site faces onto a dense building pattern and fabric, which encourages pedestrian use. The surrounding area is generally accessed via car, indicated by the numerous parking areas in the nearby area and around St Mary’s Church.

2.5 The current building is on a sloping site, with a drop in elevation from Paynes Park to the High Street of circa 5 metres.

2.6 2no. commercial units front the building on the High Street. Above there are two storeys of storage units. The building appears to be a reconstruction of an older elevation, and hence has reinstated certain replicated Victorian architectural features. At ground level, the signage of the retail units is not in line with those of adjacent units. A series of balconettes are misaligned with the windows over, and are clearly ornamental, as they do not offer any practical use. There are no brick lintels over the windows, which suggest that the elevation is not constructed in traditional methods.

Though a cornice is installed at the head of the elevation, the roof is noticeably set back from the edge, and not a correct replication of this feature. The pitched roof only extends a short distance back, and not over the whole roof, which then turns into a modern flat roof construction.

2.7 A car park fronts the site on Paynes Park. This slopes towards the High Street, and acted as the main delivery access point for the commercial units on the High Street.

2.8 Paynes Park does not contain any of the traditional features of the High Street, and is of lower architectural merit. There are no distinct architectural features of value adjacent to the site, and the majority of buildings appear to have been built in the early to mid-twentieth century.

2.9 To the north of the site on Paynes Park, Poppy House is another such modern building, which has built close to the boundary. Separating the site and Poppy House is a narrow vehicular service access, which serves 3no. car parks. This does not connect to the High Street and is not considered a pedestrian thoroughfare.

2.10 To the South of the site, Market Place provides a historic market square, around which many attractive architectural features can be found. This includes traditional Tudor houses, lead lined turrets, Tudor jettying, stone column detailing, stucco rendering, arcades, carriage way openings and dormer windows. Cobbled paving defines the boundary of the square. Many of these features form an architectural inspiration palette for the proposed development.

2.11 Further analysis can be found in the accompanying Heritage Statement.

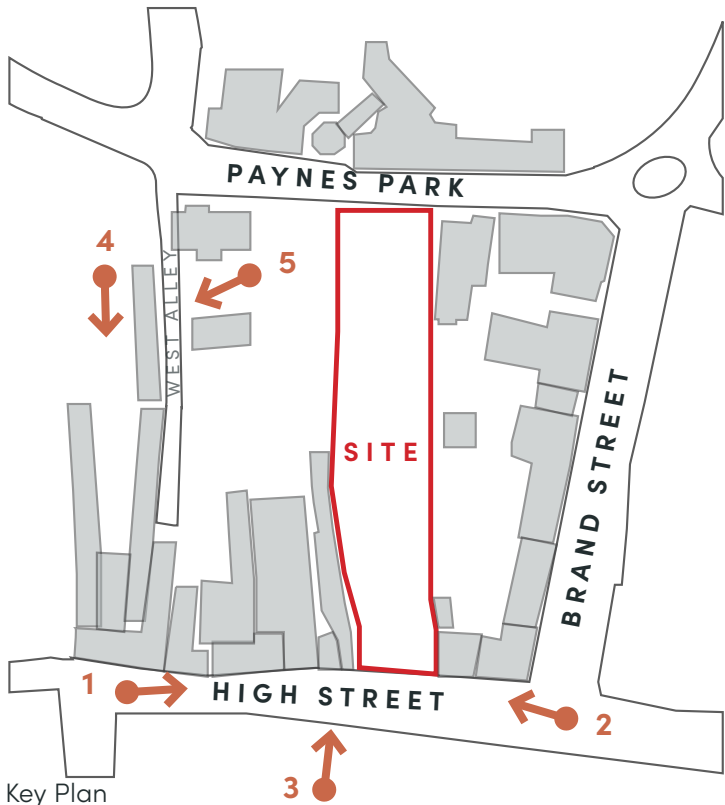
High Street



1. View from South along High Street



2. View from North along High Street



3. View of the listed pub neighbouring the site.



4. Existing Arcade South East of the Car Park



5. Existing Retail along West Alley

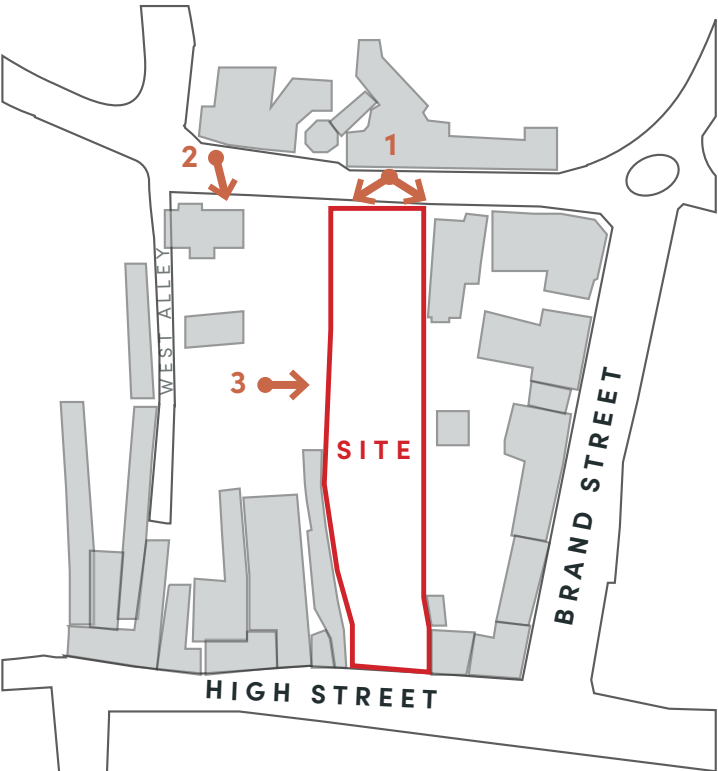
VARIED ELEVATION WIDTH ACROSS HIGH STREET - SITE SIDE



Paynes Park



1. Existing Panoramic View of Paynes Park



Key Plan



2. Paynes Park House



3. Existing Side Elevation

3.0 Site Analysis

Conservation Character Areas

3.1 The site is situated within the Hitchin Conservation Area Character Area 2a. This area houses a number of listed buildings as shown in the diagram opposite, in particular the adjacent public house previously named 'The Cock' along High Street, and an adjacent residential cottage to the north of the site.

3.2 The facade along High Street is visible in the Conservation Character Area Key View 4, as indicated in the diagram opposite.



Photograph taken facing south on High Street, Similar view to Conservation Area 2a, Key View 4



Architectural Site Heritage & Features

3.3 The accompanying Archaeological Report highlights links to medieval origins for Hitch, with late-Saxon findings to adjacent sites on Paynes Park. It is considered however that 19th and 20th Century construction activities would have truncated earlier remains in some areas of the site (east).

3.4 Historical reference photos have been provided courtesy of North Hertfordshire Museum.

3.5 The High Street has developed to historically house retail units on the ground floor, with distinct detailing, ornamentation and separation from what would be residential units above. Retail units had cabinet windows and a close relation to the pedestrian realm. Above, sash windows are articulated with stone surrounds, brick lintels and string courses. Dormer windows were also typical of the area.

3.6 Carriageways were a typical feature of the area, with openings leading into rear courtyards, as far back as the 1820s and '30s.

3.7 Buildings were arranged over Ground floor, and three storeys over (within roof space)

3.8 In the 1960s, a new building and front was constructed, and housed a stone-banded commercial unit at Ground Floor (Woolworth & Co) and a reconstructed roof over. This removed the carriageways and dormers.

3.9 This lower, commercial elevation was then again rebuilt, in 2011, creating the commercial street front on site currently.

3.10 The above illustrates that the current elevation is not historic, but rather one that has been copied and poorly replicated a number of times, diluting any historical features or value into a pastiche of the previous building.



Historic Shop Frontage 1890*



Historic Lavender Working behind Chemist 1890*



9-10 High Street 1890*



9-10 High Street 1910



9-10 High Street 1929



9-10 High Street 1965



Hitchin Tithe Map 1841**

3.0 Previous Application History & Consultations

Pre-Application September 2022 [22/00976/PRE] Feedback Summary

3.11 The below proposal was put forward to North Hertfordshire District Council (NDC) in September 2022. The proposed scheme included retaining 2 retail units along the high-street and introducing 50 apartments, each with a parking space.

3.12 The images show a selection of the submitted information.

3.13 The design maintained the high street presence and introduced a route through the site for residents. The following points summarise the responses received from the pre-application consultation:

- Presumption to retain retail use at ground floor on the High Street
- No objection in principle to residential development in the town centre given the sustainable location
- Concerned about the scale and mass of proposal, which was seen to be contrary to the character of conservation area and proximity of listed buildings
- Concerned about the lack of amenity space for new residents
- Seeking to retain walk through the site



Pre-Application Proposal Sketch Axonometric View of Proposal

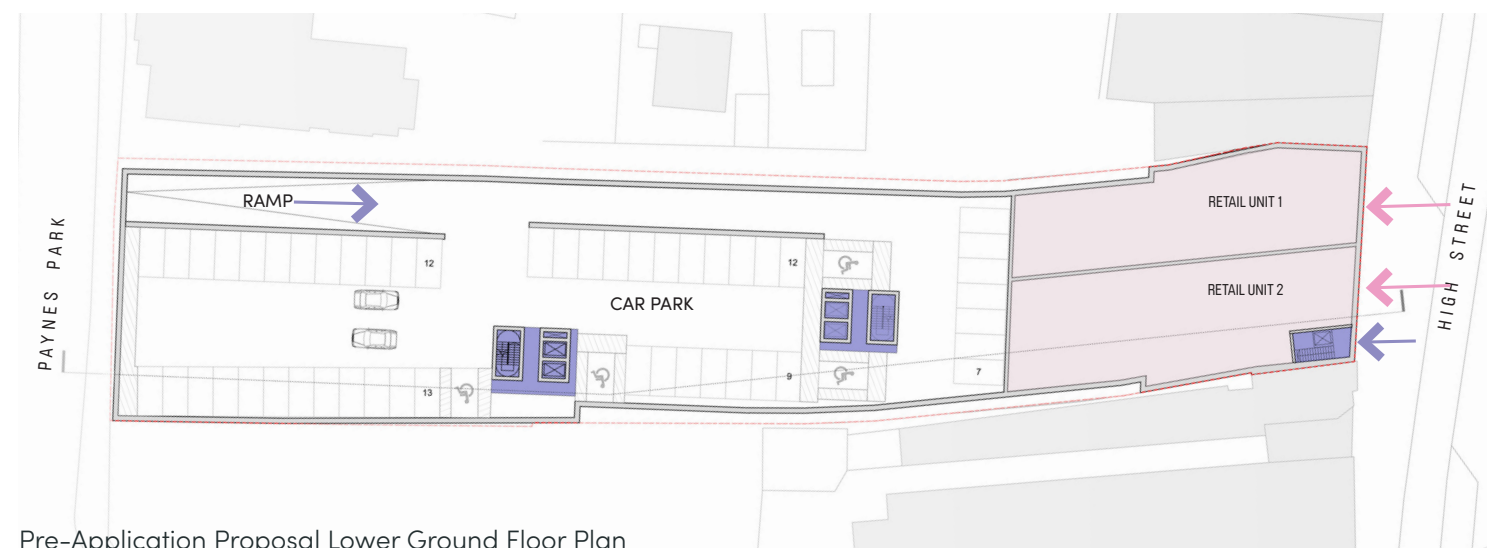
Pre-Application Feedback Design Response Summary

3.14 The Applicant and design team reviewed the received feedback and highlighted the below key factors of the design needed to be reviewed and improved upon:

- Reduced Basement/excavation, so as to limit any impact of over-development or damage.
- Reduced Density and height so as not to negatively impact the amenity of surrounding sites, as well as to ensure the scheme is of an appropriate scale for its context.
- Set back from Paynes Park to reduce the impact on the pedestrian realm, but also to ensure it does not negatively affect the wider access strategies and movement patterns.
- Increased amenity space to provide residents with higher quality spaces and a healthier environment.



Pre-Application Proposal Ground Floor Plan



Pre-Application Proposal Lower Ground Floor Plan

Public Consultation Event 10.04.2024

3.15 The Applicant arranged for a Public Consultation event to take part in the commercial units on site on the 10th of April, 2024. The event was advertised prior to taking place, including local flyerimg.

3.16 The below boards were created for the event, explaining the design to date, and sought commentary from the public and local invested parties. The boards were also left on display after the event and were available online on PowerHaus Consultancy's website for 2 weeks.

3.17 Further information on the event, methodology and results can be found in the separate Statement of Community Involvement provided by PowerHaus Consultancy.

3.18 The results of the consultation summary are summarised by PowerHaus Consulting and cover the following:

3.18.1 Positive comments include:

- Support for the use of brickwork over cladding.
- General support for the building design and intent.
- Good mix of open and built spaces.
- Mix of commercial and residential provisions
- Positive use of a vacant lot.

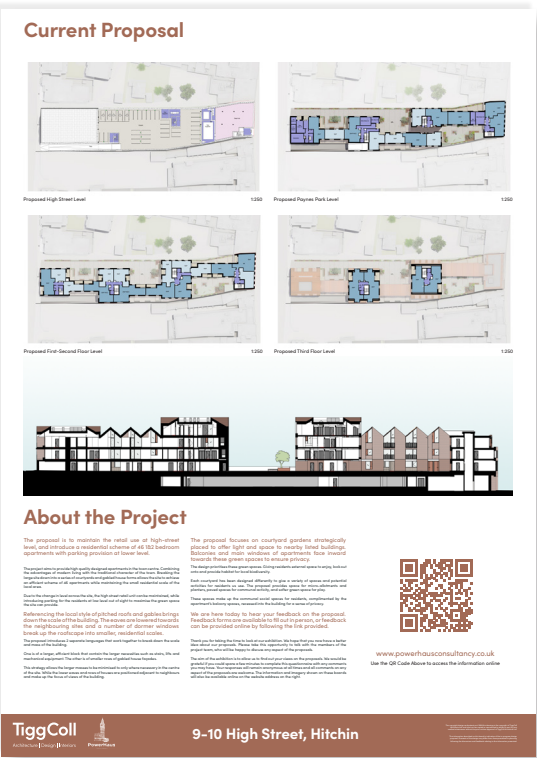
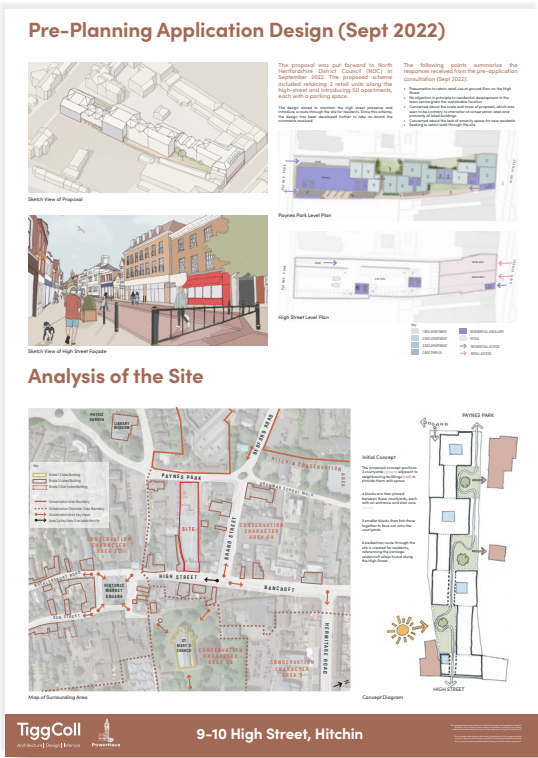
3.18.2 Negative comments include:

- Disruption during construction concerns.
- Questions over traffic impact of scheme.
- There is an opportunity to further the sustainability credentials of the scheme.
- Questions on if sufficient parking is being made available.
- Proportionality of the front elevation requires review.
- Further Affordable Housing was suggested.
- Impact on the commercial integration with the High Street.

Design Response to Public Consultation

3.19 The received feedback and responses were reviewed as part of a follow-up design review process. The following items were highlighted as items to address and review:

- Design of High Street facade. The presented proposal looked to replace the replicated and architecturally awkward elevation with a new, contemporary elevation which took cues from the local context but did not look to imitate these. Though generally this was received positively, further work was needed to make this more distinct.
- Introducing bee-friendly plant species and bee-bricks into the landscaping. This was to encourage wildlife on site, and respond to local ecological society comments.
- Incorporating PV panels into the sustainability design, to improve the site's environmental credentials.
- Including off-street waiting space and signal light system to control traffic to car park from Paynes Park.



Information boards presented on site 10.04.24 & displayed in shop front and online until the 24/04/24

4.0 Proposed Scheme

Overall Concept

4.1 The scheme uses the historical presence of inner courtyards as its main design concept. As the site is located in a dense and pedestrian setting, the scheme creates 3no. inner courtyards, linked via an indirect path, taking advantage of the long and narrow site.

4.2 These courtyards are located in a manner that offsets any building mass away from neighbouring buildings, increasing the distance to adjacent window and users.

4.3 The three courtyards are bound by 4no. residential 'core' blocks with one fronting each street elevation. These are connected with 3 smaller connecting 'link' residential blocks defining the courtyards. The courtyards become focal points for the residents, where there can be communal gathering and space sharing. Each courtyard has its own character and landscape strategy.

4.4 A clear architectural language is expressed for the 4no. core blocks, and is complemented by the architecture of the connecting 'link' blocks. These take design cues from the local area and are described in the following sections.

4.5 The site's natural slope means the High Street retail sits at a lower level to the residential scheme. Hence a podium deck is created, which is level to Paynes Park, with parking below. The ramp then forms the vehicular access to this parking.

