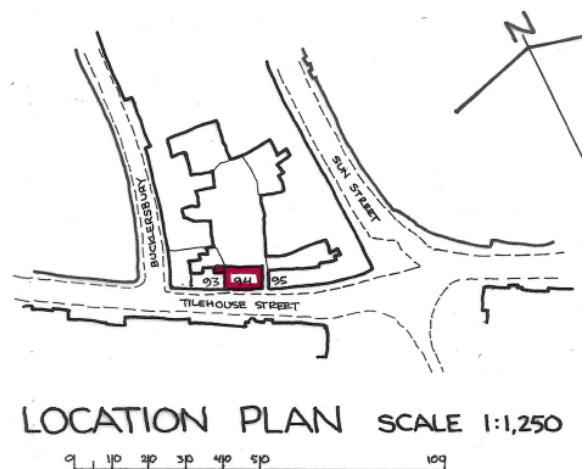


Officer Clare Skeels
Date 15 January 2025

Our Ref:
Your Ref: 24/01623/FP

94 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, SG5 2DW

Change of use of existing showroom / workshop to form one 3 bed dwelling including insertion of first floor balcony and roof light to existing roof slope.



North Herts Local Plan 2011 - 2031

Policy SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops

The policy states that the Council will protect the vitality and viability of the town centres across the District, including Hitchin, by promoting, protecting and enhancing the provision of shops, financial and professional services, cafes, restaurants, pubs or drinking establishments or takeaways. Criterion (b) says that we will support proposals for main town centre uses in the town centres, including Hitchin where they are appropriate to the size, scale, function, catchment area, historic and architectural character of the centre.

The supporting text does state that in general terms, shops will be expected to concentrate in primary frontages with related retail and service uses permissible in secondary frontages.

However, the policy and the supporting text is silent on the loss of retail space to residential uses.

Policy SP13 : Historic Environment

Policy SP13 recognises the value of the protection and enhancement of the historic environment and states in criterion (a) that there will be a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting according to their significance.

Detailed comments have been made by the Senior Conservation Officer in respect of the effect of the proposed development on the heritage asset.

Policy ETC5 : Secondary Shopping Frontages

The policy defines the secondary shopping frontage in Hitchin. The defined secondary retail frontage includes 94 Tilehouse Street, as illustrated in this extract from the Policies Map.

The policy has two criteria which state that planning permission will be granted at ground floor level for:

- (a) shops, financial and professional services, restaurants, cafes, pubs or drinking establishments
- (b) other main town centre uses** if it does not individually or cumulatively, undermine the retail function of the centre or detract from the centre's vitality and viability.

** Main Town Centre Uses are defined in the Local Plan glossary:

Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres), leisure, entertainment facilities, intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, night-clubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres, and bingo halls), offices, and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).

The supporting text in the Local Plan (paragraph 5.25) does suggest that evidence in the form of predicted footfall, opening times and linked trips will be required for any application seeking to meet part b of Policy ETC5 to assess the impact on the daytime retail function, vitality and viability. No evidence has been provided in support of this application.



NPPF – December 2024

In terms of determining applications which affect heritage assets, the NPPF sets out a number of requirements which should be considered.

These are addressed in the comments provided by the Senior Conservation Officer.

Supplementary Planning Documents

Hitchin Town Centre Strategy

The supporting text in the Local Plan acknowledges the role of Town Centre Strategies to promote the vitality and viability of the centres. Whilst work has started on a new Town Centre Strategy for Hitchin, it has not yet been published.

The Hitchin Town Centre Strategy was adopted by the Council in November 2004, predating the adopted Local Plan. Given how long ago the Strategy was adopted, it is considered that it cannot be used to assess the current proposal.

Conclusion

The proposal to change the use of the property from the existing showroom / workshop to a 3 bed dwelling is not supported by Policy ETC5 as the ground floor will be used for residential purposes, rather than a main town centre use as defined in the Local Plan.

No evidence has been provided as part of the application about any attempts to sell or let the premises for the main town centre uses preferred in the Policy, which would help in considering a departure from the Policy for this application.