North Hertfordshire District Council
Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 18/00380/FP
Date: 27/04/2018
Planning Officer: JMC
Address: The Old Forge, 27A Park Street, Baldock
Subject: 1 x 3-bed detached dwelling together with reconstruction and conversion of existing barn to provide 1 x 2-bed detached house.

The Old Forge is not listed but it is located within the Baldock Conservation Area. The building is an entry on the Register of Buildings of Local Importance for Baldock which was adopted by NHDC on 17th June 2003. Entry no.16 refers to 'Outbuilding, The Barn, 18 Park Street' and is described as:

"Timber-framed building with plain clay tiled roof. Orientated to follow the elongated and narrow form of the plot, reflecting the characteristic arrangement of outbuildings within the historic core of Baldock. One of the small number of surviving outbuildings, reflecting the past functional uses to the rear of plots.

Reasons for Inclusion:
• Local architectural interest: Important local building type.
• Local historic interest: Important to the local industrial history of Baldock."

A Character Statement for Baldock Conservation Area was also adopted by NHDC on the same date as the BLI Register and the following sections are particularly relevant:

7.6.6 Saddlers Close is an infill development on the corner plot in Park Street. It is a cul-de-sac and has little relationship with the historic plot boundaries. In addition, the buildings have a strong domestic character and do not relate to the historic utilitarian character of this side of Park Lane.

7.6.7 There is a view of the Church tower and spire over the rooftops of the buildings in Saddlers Close.

7.6.8 Malting and outbuildings edge Park Street on the end of the rear plots to Hitchin Street. Breaks between these buildings and the walling that link them provide views though the linear plots to the rear of the buildings lining Hitchin Street. The strong elongated form of the rear plots is reflected in the way the buildings are largely orientated to follow their grain and shape, with the end boundary building generally orientated to lie parallel with the Park Street, enclosing the courtyard. The breaks between buildings would have provided a service access to the malting and inn buildings within Hitchin Street and High Street. The outbuildings are of simple gabled forms with limited openings. The walling materials are largely red brick or weatherboarding with roofs clad in plain clay tiles

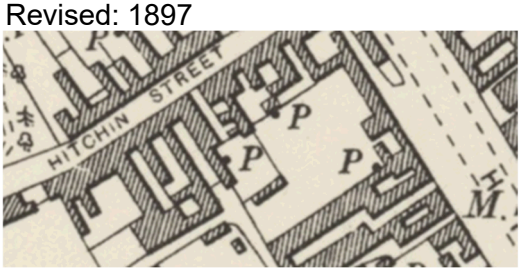
8.9 The Development of Rear Plots
The development of rear plots with buildings of strong domestic character, where the special historic character in these areas is strongly in the form of outbuildings and maltings buildings (see section 9.0 below).

Earlier editions of the Ordnance Survey provide the following chronology of development in the area from 1880 through to 1947:

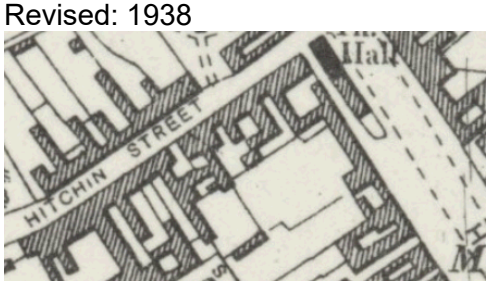
Surveyed: 1880 Published: 1884



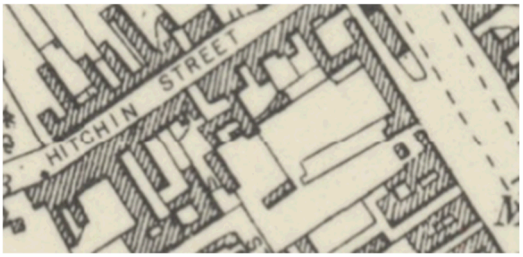
Revised: 1897



Revised: 1938



Revised: 1947



The Old Forge appears to have been detached from a much larger complex of buildings sometime around the Second World War, however, what is not clear is why the frontage building was constructed in the form/appearance we see today. The building has exposed framing, lattice metal windows and elements of Herringbone brickwork which was a popular decorative feature that was part of the 'Tudorbethan' and 'Jacobethan' style used in the 1920's and 1930's. Builders were imitating the look of Tudor and Jacobean houses which used a mixture of half timbering with herringbone brickwork. Whilst the footprint of a building in this location is similar on the 1897 and 1938 OS maps it may be the case that the building in 1897 was perhaps remodelled pre-WW2?

At page 8 of the submitted DAS it states that: *"The front part of the existing building (the barn) is identified as a building that makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. As such we have avoided removing it"*, however, removing the building prior to reconstruction is still to be regarded as demolition. Although the rear section is not identified as making a positive contribution on the Baldock Conservation Area map, it nonetheless, forms part of this linear building. Internally, the 'positive' building is distinctively barn-like with an exposed roof structure which is divided into 5no. bays (although the tie chords are of varying age and quality). Towards the rear of the front section, there is a single wide arch brace, tie chord and wide studs in the west facing wall which suggests that this might be part of an earlier building such as that shown on the OS evidence. **Although not shown as making a positive contribution, I suggest that this rear section does have positive qualities and certainly does not have a negative impact upon the conservation area.**

No structural report has been lodged with this application to suggest that it cannot be converted, however, I have seen the report prepared by Burton & Associates Ltd dated 3rd October 2004 and submitted with application ref: 05/01269/1CAC. This report concluded that:

- It is not economically viable to carry out all of the recommended repairs to the building for continued use as a furniture shop;
- There will be very little left untouched of the original barn/s once all of the necessary work is done; and

- It would be more beneficial to all to demolish and re-build in a more appropriate form.

The application was withdrawn so no formal decision was made regarding the building's demolition. I am not at all convinced that once demolished that the reconstruction will be a reconstruction at all as there is a strong inference in the 2004 report that a significant part f the fabric may need replacing. However, undertaking the repairs in-situ should hopefully enable the integrity of the existing building to be retained.

Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states that

"Where a development proposal will lead to ***less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset****, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use."*

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF states that

"The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non designated heritage assets, ***a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset****."*

Paragraph 138 of the NPPF states that

"Not all elements of a World Heritage Site or Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. ***Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area*** *or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 133 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 134, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole".*

As stated in the BLI entry, the Old Forge is one of the small number of surviving outbuildings, reflecting the past functional uses to the rear of plots in Baldock. Whilst its position on the site may be seen perhaps as an inconvenience in practical terms as this does not lend itself to a 2-unit scheme, the existing building can be appreciated fully in its context i.e. with views towards the church and the roofscape of listed buildings on Hitchin Street occupying the midpoint between The Old Forge and the St Mary's Church and this visual connectivity is regarded as a positive aspect of the conservation area (as seen in the image below).



If the principle of demolition and rebuild were to be accepted (as yet I am not supportive), I am not at all convinced that the additional unit, in terms of its location

on the site and when seen alongside the reconstructed building would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area.

Recommendation
The Old Forge is a non-designated heritage asset located within the Baldock Conservation Area (a designated heritage asset). It is considered that The Old Forge possesses some significance in its own right and also in broader terms in the context of the character and appearance of the Baldock Conservation Area. No convincing justification has been made as to why the building cannot be retained or evidence provided that the frontage building at the very least is capable of being dismantled and re-erected.

It is considered that the demolition of this BLI and the erection of two buildings, will harm the character and appearance of the Baldock Conservation Area. I, therefore, raise an **OBJECTION** on the basis that the proposal will fail to satisfy Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and as supported by the aims of Section 12 of the NPPF. There are no safeguards that the original building, once dismantled, can be re-erected, therefore, unless evidence is provided to the contrary I have to treat this proposal as one that involves demolition and loss of a non-designated heritage asset.

Furthermore, the degree of harm to the conservation area would be less than substantial but there are no discernible public benefits to outweigh this harm that would satisfy paragraph 134 of the NPPF. The proposal, therefore, fails to satisfy the aims of paragraph 132 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Proposed Submission, October 2016).

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer