

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	25/01412/FP
CASE OFFICER:	Thomas Howe
APPLICATION SITE:	18 - 19 Bancroft Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 1JQ
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Erection of five apartments, five town houses and two commercial units including parking, landscaping and alterations to access following demolition of existing commercial building and infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION:

There is AN **OBJECTION**. The scheme will not satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC) and /or 66(1) (FP/FPH) and/or 72(1) (both) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

SUGGESTED CONDITIONS:

None.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on listed building's special character – None as the site does not host a listed building.
Impact on character and appearance of the conservation area – Pre application advice was given in some detail (23/02450/PRE) where that advice clearly outlines the approach that would be supported following the demolition of the existing building. Essentially that advice was the replacement building does not necessarily need to reflect the traditional varied architecture along Bancroft as this has evolved over years and as per the pre application advice been subject to later interventions.

The guiding rule is that any development should seek to enhance and have a positive impact on the character of the conservation area. Given the location of this site i.e. a visual stop when looking down Hermitage Road any replacement building would need to not only respect the character of the conservation area but also make a positive contribution through a new well designed building.

The submitted proposal fails to respond to these points and the objections are:

1. The appearance of the front elevation does not present itself as a landmark or iconic building but a hybrid of a commercial at ground floor level and residential apartments above with minimal understanding of the varied and well-articulated other front elevations of this part of Bancroft. It fails to offer up quality design.
2. The top floor set back in not considered to make a positive contribution to the existing roof line of the conservation area given its materiality and its proposed height.

3. The development to the rear is less contentious and would not attract an objection subject to materials and landscaping.

Impact on setting of heritage assets and how this affects significance – Please see comments above.

Does the proposal on this occasion harm or preserve or enhance – The proposal is not considered to enhance the character of the conservation following the demolition of the existing building. The level of harm would be less than substantial at the higher end of that spectrum.

This is a unique opportunity to design a well-considered and potentially landmark building in the centre of Hitchin but this scheme is considered to have missed that opportunity.

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Please see above.

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

NPPF (December 2024):

The Local Plan and NPPF

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 and the policies contained within it i.e., Policy HE1. The plan was adopted November 2022.

The relevant paragraph numbers at Section 16 of the July 2021 version of the NPPF have been changed as follows:

197. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

199. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

200. 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.....

202. 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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

206. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.

The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition) – December 2017

At para 14 under the sub-heading 'Landscape Assessment and Amenity' it states that *"Analysis of setting is different from landscape assessment. While landscapes include everything within them, the entirety of very extensive settings may not contribute equally to the significance of a heritage asset, if at all. **Careful analysis is therefore required to assess whether one heritage asset at a considerable distance from another, though intervisible with it – a church spire, for instance – is a major component of the setting, rather than just an incidental element within the wider landscape.**"*

At para 17 it states (my emphasis in bold): *"All heritage assets have significance, some of which have particular significance and are designated. The contribution made by their setting to their significance also varies. **Although many settings may be enhanced by development, not all settings have the same capacity to accommodate change without harm to the significance of the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate it.** This capacity may vary between designated assets of the same grade or of the same type or according to the nature of the change. It can also depend on the location of the asset: an elevated or overlooked location; a riverbank, coastal or island location; or a location within an extensive tract of flat land may increase the sensitivity of the setting (i.e. the capacity of the setting to accommodate change without harm to the heritage asset's significance) or of views of the asset. This requires the implications of development affecting the setting of heritage assets to be considered on a case-by-case basis."*

Relevant National Guidance i.e. Historic England:

Other relevant documents (Please specify):

CONCLUSION:

There are objections to the proposal for the reasons stated above.

OFFICER: Tricia Craggs

DATE: 10.9.2025