

# North Hertfordshire District Council

## Building Conservation comments

**File Ref:** 23/00407/FP & 23/00408/LBC

**Date:** 05/02/2025

**Planning Officer:** MT

**Address:** Node Court, Drivers End Lane, Codicote, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 8TR

**Subject:** Conversion of Node Court to 8no. dwellings. Conversion of Midden building to residential and the erection of 6no. terraced dwelling-houses as development to facilitate the restoration of Node Court together with associated car parking, landscaping, boundary treatment and ancillary works (Amended Plans received 30 August 2024) (FP) and External and internal alterations to facilitate the restoration and conversion of Node Court to provide 8no. dwellings (LBC).

### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 As you are aware, I previously commented on 7 August 2023 and 22 October 2024. I have previously advised changes to the LBC description, and I note that the 2no. detached dwellings at the front of the site were omitted previously. The LBC description still does not refer to the 'Midden.'

1.2 I advise that the LBC description is amended to read as:

***'External and internal alterations to facilitate the restoration and conversion of Node Court to provide 8no. dwellings and to provide 1no. dwelling at the 'Midden as amended by plan nos ..... received on .....'***

### 2.0 The NPPF

2.1 Since last commenting the NPPF has been amended and the following paragraphs are now relevant:

- **84 b) and c)** (Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets and c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting
- **135 b) and c)** (Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments are b) visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping and c) sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- **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),
- **213** (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).

### 3.0 Context

3.1 I note the content of email received from Henry Wooldridge (Briffa Phillips Ltd) on 3 December 2024 to which an updated Design and Access Statement and the following amended drawings were attached:

- Proposed Site Plan
- Proposed Plans and Elevations (Midden Building)
- Proposed Plans and Elevations Units 9-14
- Proposed Refuse and Cycle Store Plans and Elevations
- Areas

3.2 I note that the Design and Access Statement has been updated to include all amendments to drawings, a narrative describing my previous comments and how the applicant has responded to them, and a paragraph making referencing to The Dorset Model (and its requirements) which the proposal will adopt.

**Note: The Dorset Model – Fire Safety is referenced under 3.10 of the revised 'Design and Access Statement and Planning Statement' prepared by Briffa Phillips Architects and dated December 2024 and reads as follows:**

*The proposals will incorporate the building control requirements of The Dorset Model from Dorset's Councils Building Control Technical Committee. The Dorset Model is guidance for extensions and new buildings with thatched roofs that are within 12m of a boundary. The requirements are as follows:*

*A. Rafters are to be overdrawn with a minimum 30 minute fire barrier (integrity and insulation) and this barrier should also be water resisting. 50 x 25 battens are recommended on a micro-porous boarding to allow the thatch to breathe. (Dorset Fire and Rescue Service recommend a 60-minute barrier under the thatch for property protection). The use of a flexible material or cavity foam as a fire resisting barrier is not considered acceptable for the purposes of the Dorset Model.*

*B. The chimney, including the pot, should terminate at least 1.8m above the height of the ridge. Due to the risk of condensation forming as hot gases cool, the chimney pots should be limited to a maximum height of 600mm.*

*C. A domestic mains and battery powered; interlinked smoke alarm system will be required with one smoke alarm fitted in the roof void. The system should generally be in accordance with that specified in Approved Document B to B.S. 5839 Pt. 6: 2004*

***D. A terrace may not consist of more than three thatched dwellings together.***

*E. The use of intumescent mastic is required to help seal the fire barrier along all its junctions.*

*F. The written comments of the adjoining property owner may be requested by the local authority for consideration.*

*Further, the Dorset Model makes a series of recommendations to be carefully considered in the design process. These recommendations are as follows:*

*A. The provision of a loft hatch is recommended for firefighting purposes. The minimum recommended size is 600mm x 900mm.*

*B. Advice should be sought from an approved electrical contractor regarding the most appropriate type of wiring system. Effects from rodent damage and straw debris need*

to be considered and the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting have issued guidance to their members.

C. It is NOT recommended to install recessed lighting into the ceilings below the thatch. Light fittings within the roof space to be in a bulkhead fitting. External floodlights should not be located under the eaves of the thatch.

D. Spark arrestors on the flues are NOT recommended because they can clog and restrict the flow of flue gases.

E. It is recommended that an external water tap supplied from the rising main is fitted with a hose capable of reaching all parts of the roof.

F. Any metal plumbing in roof space should use compression joints to avoid the use of blow torches.

G. In order to achieve a 'U' value of  $0.2 \text{ W/m}^2\text{K}$  for thatched roofs, the following was taken from CIBSE Guide A3: Reed = thermal conductivity 0.09 and a resistivity of 11.1 Straw = thermal conductivity 0.07 and a resistivity of 14.3 This gives a 'U' value of  $0.2 \text{ W/m}^2\text{K}$  for 450mm of reed and 350mm of straw. On this basis ceilings may require additional insulation.

My only observation is with respect to item D (in bold) above and whether this should be applied even though not a new build. If Node Court is effectively treated as a 'circular' terrace, this provides the means for spread of flame as has previously occurred at this building. To address this and as I have suggested previously, a break in roof material from thatch to perhaps tile at 6 and 12 o'clock would potentially reduce the potential risk of spread of flame.

3.3 Amendments have been made to the design of the Dairy, the Midden, and the terrace of 6 cottages. These changes are noted as follows:

**The Dairy:**

The roof lights have been changed to eyebrow dormers. This change has been updated on all plans elevations and rendered elevations.

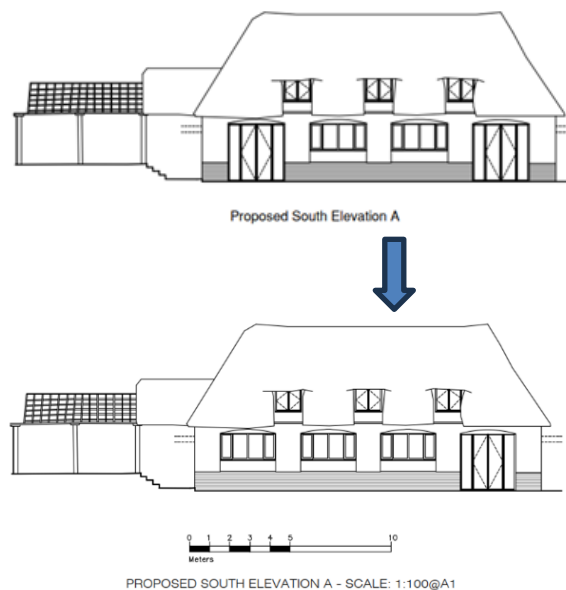


Note: Whilst I note the eyebrow dormer approach on the drawings in the revised 'Design and Access Statement and Planning Statement' prepared by Briffa Phillips Architects and dated December 2024, I have not seen the full series of amended drawings outside of this document.

**The Midden:**

*Building Conservation Commented: 'retaining the existing opening serving the hallway entrance to the far left of Elevation A, thereby, creating an asymmetrical elevation.'*

*Action: the Ground Floor Plan and Elevation A have been amended to retain the existing opening, thus creating an asymmetrical elevation, as shown in the amended drawings.*



Note: Amendments are acceptable.

**The 6 Cottages:**

*Firstly, the Gross Internal Area of each dwelling has been increased to 75.7 meters squared to comply with the national space standards. Subsequently, the pitch of the roof has reduced to 30 degrees in order to minimise the height of the terrace.*

**1. Building Conservation Comment: 'the Heritage Consultant considers that the lack of chimney stacks may appear 'incongruous'.**

*Action: A functioning fireplace and chimney stack added to each dwelling, as shown in the amended plans and elevations.*

**2. Building Conservation Comment: 'number of roof lights and ground floor windows could appear 'crowded'.**

*Action: Roof lights reduced in quantity from 3 to 2; Ground floor windows reduced in quantity and updated to better respond to the proportions of the dwelling, as shown in the amended elevations.*

**3. Building Conservation Comment: 'I suggest that the entrances could be improved by extruding the porches'.**

*Action: Plans and elevations updated to integrate a front porch at the entrance of each dwelling.*

**4. Building Conservation Comment: 'introducing solid 'plank' or 'flush-panel' door type or even a door type to match that shown at Plate 3 of the submitted HBIA'.**

*Action: Front door design changed to a solid plank door type with a small window that corresponds with the proportions of the dwelling, as shown in the amended elevations.*

**5. Building Conservation Comment: 'omitting the side lights' (from door).**

*Action: Side lights omitted and updated on drawings, as shown in the amended plans and elevations.*

**6. Building Conservation Comment: 'I am unwilling to support a truncated ridge detail with bargeboards that further serve to emphasise the truncated design.'**

*Action: Barge board detail omitted from the design; gables are now complemented by a parapet wall, as shown in the amended elevations. In addition, gables no longer have a truncated ridge, rather a 30 degree pitch with a ridge.*

**7. Building Conservation Comment: 'I find both the height of the through-eaves gable forms on the rear and the visually 'heavy' design of the glazing to also be detracting features'.**

*Action: The through-eaves gable omitted and changed to a far smaller dormer window design, as shown in the amended plans and elevations. The glazing has been redesigned to be appear much lighter and more discrete in relation to the proportions of the dwellings.*

Note: Of all the items above the only one I have further comment to make on is no.7 and this comes down to interpretation. Whilst I raised a concern re: height of the through-eaves gable forms and the visually 'heavy' design of the glazing in the previous scheme, I was not necessarily opposed to through-eaves per say. For this reason, I am of the view that modest through-eaves dormers perhaps even with 3-over-3 sashes and with increased articulation of the gables to these dormers can be encouraged. Furthermore, the elevation drawing makes no reference to materials but with the main roof pitch set at 30 degrees this would not be conducive to handmade clay tile. I assume this would be natural slate or perhaps machine-made clay tile? The latter would need to be considered carefully. There is also no indication as to whether the walls would be facing buff or red brick or painted brickwork to echo that of the Dairy? This may affect the wording of conditions.



**Site Plan:**

- *Site plan updated to include the revised design for the 6 cottages.*
- *Road and landscaping features amended in response to the new cottage design, including planters at the front of each porch, and a 'passing place' to facilitate vehicular paths.*
- *Refuse and Cycle stores updated on site plan to coincide with new design.*

**Note: No further comment**

**4.0 Draft conditions (ref: 23/00408/LBC only).**

1. The work to which this consent relates shall be begun by not later than the expiration of the period of 3 years from the date of this notice.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. Node Court shall be re-thatched using Norfolk Reed with wheat straw ridges and not combed wheat reed unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 16(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031.

3. Prior to the occupation of any units, the thatched walkway linking the Dairy with The Midden shall be refurbished and confirmation of the completed works shall be submitted in writing to the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 16(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031.

4. Before work begins, precautions shall be taken to secure and protect the following exterior features during the building work:

- i. Plaque on gateway range (Margot Holmes).
- ii. Hobbs, Hart & Co iron plate.
- iii. Tap with a recessed cast-iron surround.

as recorded at DP33, DP41, DP45 respectively of Appendix 4 - Photographic Index forming part of the 'Historic Building Impact Assessment January 2023' prepared by Wardell Armstrong supporting this consented scheme. No such features shall be disturbed or removed temporarily or permanently without the prior approval in writing of the Local Planning Authority and shall remain in place for the duration of the construction/ alteration work hereby permitted.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 16(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031.

5. Details of all external flue extraction systems shall be submitted to and approved in be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the works hereby granted consent. Thereafter the external flue extraction systems shall be implemented with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 16(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

- 5 Metric scale section drawings of all new windows (including 1:1 scale drawing of proposed glazing bars) together with details of window ironmongery shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the manufacture and installation of the new windows. Thereafter the windows shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 16(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

- 6 Details of all new internal & external doors shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the manufacture and installation of the new internal & external doors. Thereafter the internal & external doors shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this curtilage-listed building under Section 16(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

## **5.0 Draft conditions (ref: 23/00407/FP only).**

It assumed that the officer will be dealing with hard and soft landscaping, boundary treatments, cycle/bin stores etc. via condition.

1. Standard time condition.
2. Details or actual sample of the roof material for the terraced block shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the new roof being. Thereafter the roof shall be implemented in accordance with the approved roof material.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

3. A sample panel of the facing brickwork for the terraced block shall be made available for inspection on site prior and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to construction above DPC level. Thereafter the facing brickwork shall be implemented in accordance with the approved sample panel.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

4. Metric scale section drawings of all new windows (including 1:1 scale drawing of proposed glazing bars) for the terraced block shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the manufacture and installation of the new windows. Thereafter the windows shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

5. Details of all new rainwater goods for the terraced block shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the installation of the rainwater goods. The rainwater goods shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of this grade II listed building under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

- 6.1 Node Court, The Midden, and the former thatched walkway between form a grade II listed former model dairy built in 1928 with its design having roots in the Picturesque revival and was probably inspired by Marie Antoinette's dairy in 'Le Hameau', Versailles. This circular rendered brick building stands in a rural and relatively verdant, open setting. Its significance lies not only in its unique design and extensive use of thatch but also in the fact that it set early C20 standards for hygiene and efficient dairy farming in England. Great weight has been given to the asset's conservation (para 213, NPPF) and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (para 210, NPPF). Although the quantum of new development is considered harmful to the setting and thereby the significance of Node Court, it is accepted that this would constitute

appropriate enabling development to secure the future of this heritage asset (para 84b, NPPF).

- 6.2 I have reconsidered the proposals considering the more recent material submitted. The introduction of eyebrow dormers to the dairy, the amended front elevation to The Midden, further improved changes to the new build terrace all point towards a much more positive intervention. However, I have raised two matters: i) part D of the Dorset Model as highlighted in bold on page 2 of this response and ii) the design of the terrace's rear dormers. Having said that, the improvements to the terrace mean that this building responds more positively to its context which includes the setting to Node Court and The Midden thus more closely aligns with para 135 b) and c) of the NPPF. Throughout this process I have continually sought to encourage a scheme that will sit well with the heritage asset and its setting.

## **7.0 Recommendation**

- 7.1 The new build terrace will in my opinion, occasion some harm to the significance of the heritage assets due to the design and amount of development sought. Whilst the amount of development appears to be fixed because of the assessment and outcome of the feasibility appraisal, it is acknowledged that some effort has been made to address design concerns. Subject to feedback on the dormer window issue, I conclude that whilst the terrace would result in some harm to Node Court's significance, thus would not satisfy the provisions of Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the aims of paragraphs 135 c) and Section 16 of the NPPF and the aims of Policies HE1 and HE2 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031, the degree of harm is considered to be low on the less than substantial continuum.
- 7.2 It is for the case officer to consider if the extent of harm identified is outweighed by the benefits of bringing Node Court back into a long-term viable use, which I consider would be the case. For this reason, I raise **NO OBJECTION**.

**Mark Simmons**  
**Senior Conservation Officer**