

CONSERVATION TEAM CONSULTATION APPLICATION RESPONSE

APPLICATION REF:	25/02330/FP & 25/02331/LBC
CASE OFFICER:	AHD
APPLICATION SITE:	1 John Street, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 9BE
DESCRIPTION OF WORKS:	Change of use of existing offices into 6 bed HMO (Class C4). Internal alterations to facilitate change of use of existing offices into 6 bed HMO (Class C4).

RECOMMENDATION:

I am concerned about i) the studwork wall alongside the staircase, ii) the location of the WC in the 'middle room', iii) privacy to the first-floor bathroom and iv) the poor natural light to the open passage as access to the HMO. Paragraph 215 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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. The low level of less than substantial harm that I have identified would not be outweighed by public benefits, and it has not been evidenced that the HMO would be the optimum viable use. Notwithstanding that, I suggest that we await feedback to my suggestions below and to the draft conditions before I offer a final recommendation.

SHORT SUMMARY:

Impact on listed building's special character and the character and appearance of Royston Conservation Area

The proposal will have some impact upon the listed building's special character. The works are internal only, therefore, there would be no impact upon the character or appearance of the RCA.

Harm, preserve or enhance.

The proposal will occasion a small amount of less than substantial harm to the listed building's special character.

SITE CONTEXT:

No. 1 John Street is grade II listed and is located in the Royston Conservation Area. The buildings and the area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF.

The building is described in the link below and was added to the Statutory List on 11 June 1976:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1174570?section=official-list-entry>

DETAILED ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

I note the content of the submitted Heritage Statement, particularly that no alterations are proposed to the principal external fabric or elevation of the listed building. Under the section entitled 'Impact Assessment' the following is noted:

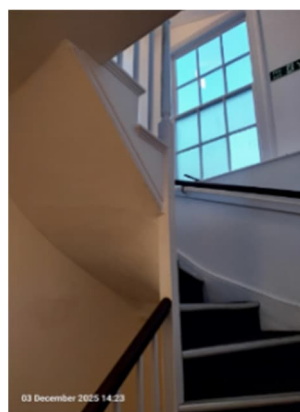
- **External Fabric:** No alterations proposed; the external appearance, roofscape, and frontage will remain unchanged.
- **Internal Fabric:** Alterations will be limited to non-structural partitions, services, and finishes. Care will be taken to minimise disturbance to any historic features.
- **Setting:** The proposed use does not alter the building's contribution to the street scene or its group value with adjoining listed buildings.
- **Significance:** The proposals result in negligible harm to heritage significance and ensure the building remains in viable, long-term use.

At ground floor, three internal doorways are proposed to be closed off, a stud wall introduced alongside the existing staircase and a WC inserted in to the 'middle' room which is also annotated as new HMO Laundry Room.

There are three aspects of the proposed ground floor layout that are of concern:

- Enclosing the staircase,
- Potentially underdrawing/fire protection of staircase as it rises over the corridor serving the office, and
- Location of WC serving HMO

Essentially the access arrangement to the HMO does not work without forming a clearly defined and enclosed circulation space separate to the office use. The proposal shows a stud wall hard up against the stair balustrade which is a disappointing detail. There are no obvious alternatives in the event that the ground floor is shared as the uses need to be separated. If the whole of the space at the foot of the stairs goes with the HMO then more invasive works would be required to provide circulation between the offices and the kitchen/WC/Boardroom room at the rear. The question is whether this small amount of less than substantial harm is consider an acceptable price to pay for securing a viable use to the first and second floors?



The underside of the stair (as it rises) is curved and probably lath-and-plaster. It has almost a sculptural presence that I would not wish to see modified or removed but I am conscious of a potential compatibility issue with Building Regs.

The WC serving the HMO would impact upon the proportions of the central room and which also includes a fire surround which is in the style of the most common Regency

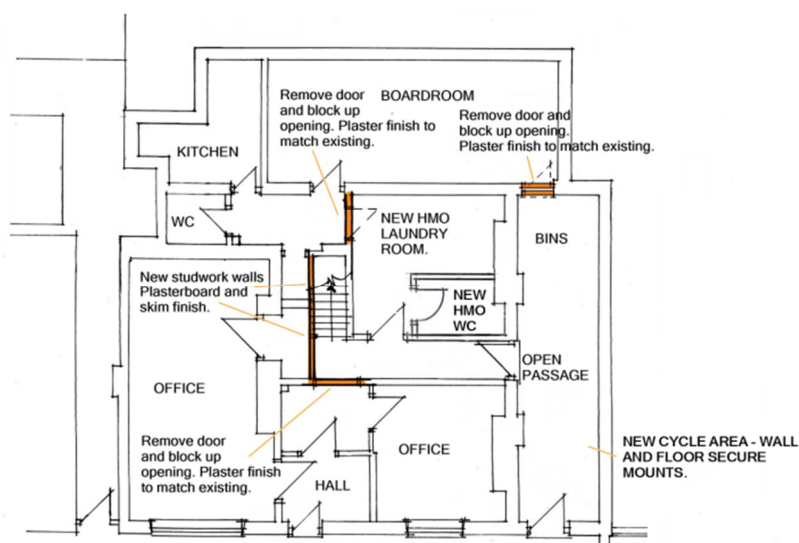
fireplace pattern with reeded jambs and corner roundels. Whilst I cannot say whether this is original or reproduction it is very much in keeping with the building's early C19 date and similar fire surrounds exist elsewhere in the building.



I would like to understand what is required to service the laundry room, for instance the WC will require plumbing. Although the 'middle room' is currently used as a store, it is a 'higher value' interior when compared with the boardroom which is in a later flat roof addition. In my view, a better arrangement may be to:

- Allocate half of the boardroom to providing a laundry and WC to the HMO albeit this would only be accessible from the open passage and not from the access corridor
- Close off the existing door to the storeroom (currently shown as proposed access to laundry room) and maintain other door access to the 'middle room' for use as a third office. The half of the boardroom that remains with the office scheme could then be utilised as a store. This will keep the middle room in tact with no plumbing etc.

If this is not agreed then an alternative but less favourable fall back position would be to reposition the WC to the diagonally opposite corner of the room which would also be in front of what would be a newly formed section of stud infill where the door is currently shown closed off. I positively encourage my suggestion above.



Externally, there is a two door access to the HMO. The first is directly off John Street and is a black-painted 6-panel door (which is similar to the main entrance door) whilst the

second door is the original side door into the building and is green-painted with glazing to the upper 2 panels (below left). Internally, this entrance is concealed behind cupboards (below right).



The applicant should be encouraged to introduce a flat roof light (will require listed building consent) onto the single-storey flat roof and which would then provide natural light to the HMO entrance door in what is currently an unappealing covered area.



At first floor floor a wall is proposed to removed and a new studwork wall introduced to create a bathroom.

The estate agent informed me on site that an alternative to moving the wall to form the bathroom at this level has been considered. This could be done by repositioning the door off-centre allowing 800mm space to the side of the door to install a shower. I don't know if this being formally proposed but the matter could be raised with the applicant. However, if the wall is still proposed to be moved I find this unobjectionable. There remains, however, the issue of creating a bathroom directly behind a large 6-over-6 sash window with a low sill height. Either a blind or obscure film would probably be required to ensure privacy. The latter will require LBC.

At second floor, two doors and a small section of non-original wall is proposed to be removed and a sliding door introduced.

No objections raised at this level.

Suggested conditions (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. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out wholly in accordance with the details specified in the application and supporting approved documents and plans listed above.

Reason: To ensure the development is carried out in accordance with details which form the basis of this grant of permission.

3. The existing original side entrance door shall be retained as the entrance to the HMO from the open passage 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 the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

4. All 4-panels doors at first and second floor level shall be retained in situ unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Where new doors are required or where plain faced doors exist at first and second floor, the openings shall receive a 4-panel door to match the appearance of retained 4-panel doors at these levels.

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

5. The bannister rail, spindels and newel post to the stairs at ground floor level shall be retained in-situ alongside the new studwork wall.

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

6. Full details of any fire and acoustic floor separation details including any proposed works to the underside of the stairs at ground floor, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the development and the works 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 the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

7. Full details of any mechanical ventilation systems shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of that part of the development and the works 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 the grade II listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

HERITAGE POLICY ASSESSMENT:

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

Sections 16(2) & 66(1). Section 72(1) does not apply as internal works only.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031:

Policy HE1

NPPF (December 2024):

The following paragraphs are relevant:

- **135 c)** (*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment*),
- **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*),
- **212** (*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*).

CONCLUSION:

I am unconvinced by the treatment of the 'middle room' and there is a case to suggest that the studwork wall alongside the existing staircase occasions some harm.

OFFICER: Mark Simmons

DATE: 04/12/2025