

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/01623/FP & 24/01624/LBC

Date: 21/10/2024

Planning Officer: TR

Address: 94 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 2DW

Subject: see below

- **24/01623/FP** - *Change of use of existing showroom/workshop to form one 3-bed dwelling including insertion of first floor front balcony and roof light to existing roofslope.*
- **24/01624/LBC** - *Internal and external alterations to existing showroom/workshop to facilitate the conversion to one 3-bed dwelling.*

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 I raise an **OBJECTION** on the basis that the proposal will fail to satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC only), 66(1) (FP only) and 72(1) (both) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 16 of the NPPF and the aims of Policy HE1: Designated Heritage Assets, of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. I offer the following R for R for 24/01624/LBC:

No.94 is located within the Hitchin Conservation Area and is described as having a C19 stucco front and C19 shop window but possesses what may be C17/C18 frame elements. By reason of a.) the external railings in front of the first-floor loading doors, b.) the application of mirror foil to the ground floor front shop windows, c.) the loss of fabric to form the new staircase and d.) the loss of fabric to create the study door opening, it is considered that the proposal will occasion harm to the listed building's special character and harm the appearance of the Hitchin Conservation Area. The proposal will fail to satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 16 of the NPPF and the aims of Policy HE1: Designated Heritage Assets, of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. The degree of harm is considered to be low to moderate on the less than substantial harm continuum and there are no public benefits identified. Furthermore, it has not been demonstrated that this would result in the optimum viable use of the building.

- 1.2 In addition, para 200 of the NPPF states that “In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance”. There is a lack of detail with respect to i) number and position of mechanical ventilation, ii) heat recovery system and iii) number and position of SVP’s to be able to make a full assessment of this application.

2.0 Context

2.1 No.94 Tilehouse Street is grade II listed and is located within the Hitchin Conservation Area. Both the building and area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF.

2.2 The list entry reads as follows:

C19 stucco front, Welsh slated roof. 2 storeys, C19 shop window, 3 first floor lattice casement windows with painted arched lights. Included for group value.

Nos 94 to 96 (consec) form a group.

As noted above, no date is given for the original building, although the grade II listed no.95 adjacent is attributed to being C17 or earlier but much altered.



2.2 In a document found on the web entitled 'Probus Walk round Hitchin 24th January 2022' it says:

94 and 95 Tilehouse Street were built as warehouses serving Hitchin's wool trade. Ideally located at the junction of Ickniel Way and the Great North Road, the town flourished. The wealthy wool merchants poured money into the church, making St Mary's one of the most impressive 'wool churches' in the region.



94 Tilehouse Street

This is the first-floor loading door and hoist of 94 Tilehouse Street. Now Richard Reason Pianos (but actually has been run for longer by Rupert Frost than it was by Richard). I used to love watching the pianos being hoisted up. The pulley had been painted black but Rupert has kindly restored it to its original red.

Hitchin was a centre for Musical Instruments with Evans Pughe Strings, John Myatt Woodwind & Brass, and Machinehead Guitars but Rupert is the only one left.

3.0 The Local Plan and NPPF

3.1 Since commenting previously, the Local Plan has been adopted (8 November 2022) and the NPPF has also changed (Dec 2023). Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 is relevant as are the following paragraphs of the NPPF:

- **200** (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)

- **203** (desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
- **205** (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
- **206** (clear and convincing justification), and
- **208** (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

4.0 The Proposal

4.1 The submitted Design, Access & Heritage Statement states:

4. No change is proposed to the elevation, other than the insertion of one new rooflight, so its group value will not be compromised. It is proposed that its first floor loading doors and its cast iron wall-crane be retained.

5. The first floor leaded light windows will be retained and new fixed pane double glazing installed internally to both maintain their appearance and to provide thermal and sound insulation. Similar glazing will be installed inside the ground floor windows. A whole-house heat recovery ventilation system will be installed. Mirror foil will be provided to the ground floor windows onto Tilehouse Street to give privacy whilst not affecting the appearance of the building. Motorised blinds will be provided for night time privacy.

6. An internal garden area will be provided at first floor level with a conservation area style rooflight. This allows the present loading doors to be retained and they could be opened as desired into this south facing space. A simple, black painted, metal balustrade will be provided for safety as shown on the application drawings. The winding mechanism of the wall-crane will be retained.

7. The building will be insulated to meet present Building Regulation standards of thermal efficiency.

9. There is an existing yard area for waste bins and bicycle storage.

4.2 With respect to point 4. above, it says that '*No change is proposed to the elevation, **other than the insertion of one new rooflight**, so its group value will not be compromised.*' However, it is acknowledged at point 6. that '*a simple, black painted, metal balustrade will be provided for safety as shown on the application drawings.*'

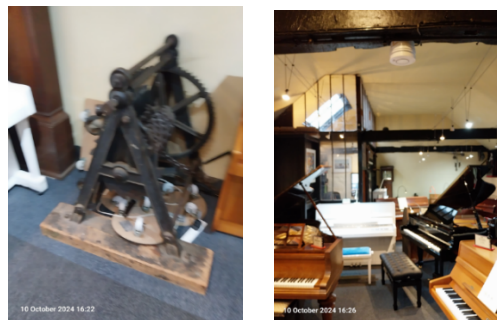
4.3 At point 5. above it says that glazing will be installed inside the ground floor windows, a mirror foil will be provided to ground floor windows and a whole-house heat recovery ventilation system will be installed. It is considered that the mirror foil will adversely affect the building's appearance, and no indication is provided as to exactly how ventilation and the heat recovery system will be introduced. I assume there would be need for further external alterations either to the front or rear of the building, although there may be scope to provide a mechanical vent to the ground floor WC on the side elevation. Also, at point 5 above it says that the leaded light windows at first floor are to be double-glazed. Should this say secondary glazing or is the intention to introduce fixed pane double glazing i.e. the windows would then be effectively triple-glazed?

4.4 Apart from the amount of internal subdivision, the proposed internal alterations require the removal of a staircase of no significance. A new staircase would be repositioned and whilst making functional sense, requires part of the first-floor construction to be removed to facilitate a new opening

being formed onto the first floor. This will result in the loss of historic fabric. A further consequence of the proposed staircase would see a modification to what is an earlier (may be original) timber-framed screen to form the study door opening. It is acknowledged that retaining a staircase in the current position impacts upon the functionality of the proposed layout, but it would be less intrusive in terms of fabric.



- 4.5 Whilst the retention of the winding mechanism of the wall-crane is noted the idea of providing a first floor 'garden' is questioned. The new roof light is not a small conservation roof light but a relatively large patent glazed opening. The roof light is not required as a means of ventilating let's say a habitable room but rather to provide natural light on this 'garden' space. It is considered that there is insufficient reason to object to the glazed screen that would part form Bedroom 3.



- 4.6 No objection is raised to the external aeration to the rear (north) elevation but questions remain regarding mechanical ventilation (kitchen, 1no. bathroom, 2no. ensuites and 1no. ground WC), any external implications of the heat recovery and the siting of potential SVP's to the 1no. bathroom, 2no. ensuites and 1no. ground WC.



- 4.7 Whilst not a conservation matter, I would have thought it would not be good practice to have to drag refuse bins internally and through the property to leave on the kerb on collection day.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer