

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/01546/FPH & 24/01547/LBC

Date: 19/03/2025

Planning Officer: HT

Address: 7 High Street, Barkway, Hertfordshire SG8 8EA

Subject: See below

1.0 Description/Recommendation

1.1 Even though the works are the same on both applications the descriptions differ as follows:

- **24/01546/FPH** - *Securing of 3 horizontal metal bars, wrapping around front left corner of building's exterior elevation to prevent movement.*
- **24/01547/LBC** - *Floorboards to be raised inside where necessary to attach bars to beams.*

I am not so sure that these descriptions adequately identify the extent of works. For instance, the floor plans suggest more than just raising floorboards internally (application form refers to new softwood boards and skirtings) and there is a suggestion that the metal plates extend round and onto the rear elevation as well so it would not be appropriate to concentrate on the front corner. More accurate descriptions may be as follows and I have put these in an email to the applicant on 18 February 2025 which you have been copied in to:

- **24/01546/FPH** - *Secure 3 steel girdle plates across north gable end and wrapping around onto front and rear elevations in association with internal metal brackets and rod ties, to prevent movement.*
- **24/01547/LBC** - *Secure 3 steel girdle plates across north gable end and wrapping around onto front and rear elevations in association with internal metal brackets and rod ties, to prevent movement. Floorboards to be raised inside where necessary to attach bars to beams and replace with new softwood boards and skirtings.*

1.2 The building is ticked as grade II* on the application form. For the avoidance of doubt the building is grade II, therefore, there is no requirement to consult either Historic England or the National Amenity Societies.

1.3 Although the applicant has ticked that pre-app advice has been received this was general advice given by the Planning Officer under ref: 23/02063/GEN addressing the application process rather than a paid pre-app specifically dealing with the current scheme.

1.4 It is considered that the proposal would impact upon the building's external appearance but would neither harm the listed building's special character or harm the special character of the Barkway Conservation Area.

1.5 Having said that confirmation is awaited from the applicant regarding a site visit to inspect the interior, particularly the floorboards. Subject to the outcome

of that visit, I am likely to conclude that the proposal will satisfy the provisions of Sections 16(2) (LBC only) 66(1) (FPH only) and 72(1) (both) of the Planning (LB & CA) Act 1990 and will accord with Section 16 of the Framework and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 and would therefore be **UNOBJECTIONABLE** in heritage terms.

2.0 Context

- 2.1 Nos. 7 and 9 (Fairbarns), High Street are grade II listed and are located in the Barkway Conservation Area. Both the building and area are Designated Heritage Assets for the purpose of applying the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework. The list entry is noted below:

Pair of houses, originally 3 or 4 dwellings. Early C19 with C18 and possibly earlier origins, extended later C19. Knapped flint with red brick dressings. Tiled roof. 2 storeys. 6 window front, 3 bays to right are more closely spaced with a high brick plinth. Ground floor: steps up with wreathed iron railings to a 6 raised panelled door, moulded bracketed hood, to left a 20 pane sash, elsewhere 12 pane sashes, all recessed with slightly cambered heads. Left bays similar with 2 entrances, a 6 panelled and a part glazed door, 2 ground floor 20 pane sashes. Central ridge stack and external end stacks with offsets. Gable end parapets with moulded kneelers. To rear left extends an integral 2 bay wing with a blocked door and glazing bar sashes, rear gable end parapet and stack. Behind this are 2 C18 red brick bays with sashes of 12, 16, and 20 panes, C18 on ground floor with cambered heads, C20 on first floor. Pantiled roof. Rear gable end of brick and flint rubble with moulded kneelers. 2 storey lean-to outshuts added to rear elevations with shallower pitch to slate roofs. Interior not inspected. Included for group value.

3.0 The Local Plan and NPPF (Dec 2024)

- 3.1 Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 is relevant as are the following paragraphs of the NPPF:
- **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).

4.0 The Proposal

- 4.1 I note the content of the submitted Supplementary Information (see below):

There has been some movement in the front elevation wall, causing a narrow crack in the flintwork to widen over a number of years. While the cause of the crack cannot be ascertained with any certainty, it seems wise to arrest further movement now. Here is an extract from the structural engineer's report (Mr Stuart Ellis of Mason Navarro Pledge):

4.2 Likelihood of further movement

4.2.1 It appears probable that the current pattern of movement, albeit slow, will continue.

4.3 Considerations

4.3.1 Flint is difficult to work with. It is not readily drilled and the bedding joints are too irregular for insertion of flexible ties.

4.3.2 The floor joists are poorly connected to the floor beams and the beams seem minimally attached to the wall timbers.

4.3.3 Movement is slow and the building's walls just need to be held in check by securing them back to the body of the house.

4.4 Proposed Approach.

4.4.1 Apply restraint girdles around the areas of wall affected by movement.

4.4.2 Tie the girdles back to internal structure (roof and floor members) and then ensure connection of that structure back to the members that give them support.

4.4.3 Excavate externally to check for deteriorated mortar and point, as necessary.

- 4.2 There is no doubting that the proposal will have an impact upon the external appearance of this listed but the rationale for the girdle system is understood considering that this is principally a flint-faced building and that it is probable that the current pattern of movement will continue. Due to the irregular bedding joints, it is assumed that a Helibar system or similar cannot be deployed (presumably a reference to the 'flexible ties' above)?
- 4.3 I am not qualified or indeed have the experience to offer any other alternative solution to that proposed when it comes to this type of structural stabilisation works to flint buildings. It is my understanding that should a repair of the wall have been proposed, if the surface flints are removed/dislodged, a soft inner core of mortar and rubble is often exposed, and the stability of the flint facings and integrity of the walls may then be placed at risk.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer