



TRANSPORT NOTE

To: **North Hertfordshire District Council**
From: **Iceni Projects (Transportation)**
Date: **February 2025**
Title: **The Exchange, Queen Street, Hitchin SG4 9TW - Part 3, Schedule 2, Class MA of the Town and Country Planning, General Permitted Development Order (GDPO) 2015 (Application Two)**

Introduction

1. Iceni Projects Ltd (IP) has been instructed by Sonar Group (the 'Applicant') to advise on the highways and transport matters relating to the change of use of the existing commercial building formerly known as 'The Exchange', Hitchin (the 'Site') to residential accommodation under *Part 3, Schedule 2, Class MA of the Town and Country Planning, General Permitted Development Order (GDPO) 2015*.
2. The Site falls within the jurisdiction of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) as the Highway Authority (HA). The building is currently occupied by Xchange Fitness on two floors at basement and ground level floor (Use Class E) with associated coffee shop facilities. The location of the Site is shown within **Figure 1.1**.

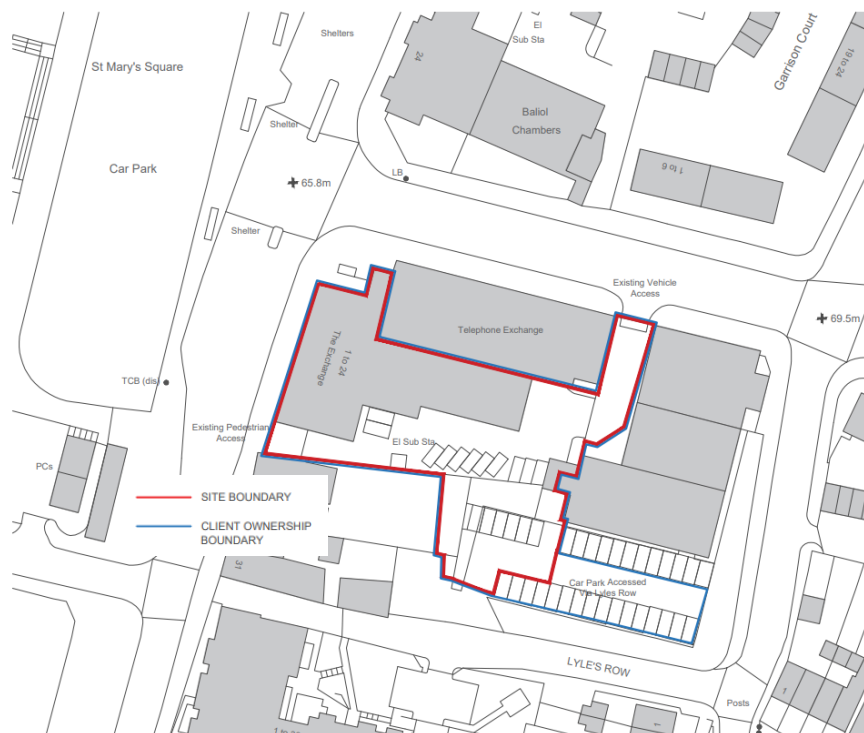


Figure 1.1 Site Location

3. With regards to the GDPO, Part 3, Schedule 2 of Class MA indicates that there is a requirement on the developer to apply to the LPA, in this case NHDC, for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required regarding the transport and highways impacts of the development. This will be dealt with under the provisions of paragraph W (prior approval).
4. Paragraph W.5 under '*Procedure for applications for prior approval under Part 3*', requires the LPA to consider whether "*the development is likely to result in a material increase or a material change in the character of traffic in the vicinity of the site*". If the LPA considers this to be the case, paragraph W.5(b) states that they must consult "*the local highway authority, where the increase or change relates to traffic entering or leaving a classified road or proposed highway, except where the local planning authority is the local highway authority*".
5. In the context of the Permitted Development Rights (PDR) and whether this will result in a material increase or change in traffic levels, paragraph 116 of the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* states "*Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.*"
6. This Transport Note therefore has been prepared to support a PDR submission in accordance with the GDPO- Part 3, Schedule 2, Class MA and in particular part (a) outlined below:

MA.2.— (1) Development under Class MA is permitted subject to the following conditions. (2) Before beginning development under Class MA, the developer must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required as to— (a) transport impacts of the development, particularly to ensure safe site access.

Existing Site

7. The Site is centrally located within Hitchin town centre, surrounded by residential neighbourhoods to the east and mixed-use streets which provide a strong commercial offering, predominantly at ground floor, to the north, south and west. Bus stops are located immediately opposite the Site on Queen Street and Hitchin Town Square can also be accessed within 300m to the west of the site, via Churchyard Walk. In addition, the Site is close proximity to a plethora of local services and amenities within just a 5-minute walk.
8. The Site is bound by Queen Street to the west and Hollow Lane to the north. An at-grade surface rear car park and service yard, which falls within the application site boundary, abuts the southern façade of the building with access provided via an undercroft vehicular access from Hollow Lane. This provides access toward a refuse collection area and c.11no. parking spaces.
9. Vehicular access into the Site is also accommodated via an existing access arrangement from Lyles Row to the south. This provides access toward an additional c.22no. parking spaces, of which 16no. of these spaces fall within the Applicants control however, do not form part of the Site and therefore this PDR.
10. Pedestrian access into the Site is taken via the north western and south western corners of 'The Exchange' building, via Queen Street. Both access points currently comprise stepped facilities with onward access to the ground floor level of the building, whereby the existing Finished Floor Levels (FFLs) are notably higher than levels present within the adjacent highway. The building also benefits from an existing lift for the mobility impaired. It is understood that an additional step free access into the building is provided via the rear service yard.

11. Furthermore, the Site is conveniently located close to several large public car parks within easy walking distance. The nearest of these facilities is St. Marys Car Park, which provides 24-hour access and takes access from Queen Street. Its arrangement comprises:
 - 127 standard parking spaces; and
 - 6 disabled parking spaces for Blue Badge holders;
12. It is considered that the close proximity of the public facilities at St. Marys Car Park offers temporary parking options for visitors to the Site, particularly in the early evening when you would expect visitors to arrive and depart.

Local Highway Network

Queen Street

13. Queen Street forms part of the B656, which is a main distributor road in Hitchin. It broadly runs in a north/south alignment between Hitchin train station in the north, passing through predominantly open countryside and smaller settlements such as Rush Green and Codicote, towards its junction with Church Street/Welwyn By Pass Road /Great North Road/A1 on slip (J6) in the south, which provides northbound access onto the A1 as well as the A1000 and B197.
14. Queen Street forms a two-way, mixed-use street and bus corridor, which is subject to 30mph road speed and runs from its junction with Bridge Street/Park Street in the south, following a north/south alignment toward its junction with Whinbush Road and Walsworth Road to the north. Its carriageway varies in width along its length.
15. A single lane of traffic is provided in each direction between the Queen Street/Bridge Street/Park Street junction and the Site, where the carriageway widens within the immediate vicinity of the Site to accommodate the bus stops. A ghost island right turn facility accommodates vehicles turning right from Queen Street into Hollow Lane. Further north, the northbound section of carriageway widens to two lanes on the approach to its junction with Portmill Lane and as far north as its junction with Hermitage Road. A single lane is provided southbound, albeit the wider width is retained to accommodate various ghost island right turn facilities, which provide westbound access into both Portmill Lane and St. Marys Car Park. It has direct access to the large public car park facility located directly opposite the Site on the opposite side of Queen Street.
16. A signalised pedestrian crossing point is also located within the immediate vicinity of the Site on Queen Street, facilitating the pedestrian desire line toward the northbound bus services to the western side of Queen Street as well as Hitchin Market, Hitchin Town Square and High Street, also to the west. Positioning of such pedestrian infrastructure can overcome a major barrier on a desire line which cannot safely be crossed in other ways, and where they form an essential, properly connected part of a wider network of good, safe routes which ensure walking is seen as an essential mode of transport for residents of the Site.
17. Southbound Bus services can be accessed by additional bus stops on the eastern side of Queen Street, circa 40m north of its junction with Hollow Lane, with pedestrian movements toward these services being accommodated by a refuge island crossing facility with tactile paving. Again this encourages take up given the route is easily accessible and close proximity to the Site for all residents.

Hollow Lane

18. Hollow Lane is a two-way road which is broadly residential in nature, running between its junction with Wymondley Road and Highbury Road in the east, to its junction with Queen Street in the west, where the nature of the street shifts to providing access to mixed use development, such as the Site. Hollow Lane is restricted to a maximum 5T vehicle width with the exception of loading when entering from Queen Street.
19. A large open green space abuts Hollow Lanes northern edge between its junctions with Mount Garrison and Whitehill Road and both sides of its carriageway are aligned with parallel on street parking bays. Within the vicinity of the Site, these bays fall within the Hollow Lane 'Controlled Parking Zone' (Zone G) and are therefore subject to restrictions which limit parking activity to 2 hours between the hours of 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday, with no return in 4 hours. To the west of the Hollow Lane/St. Andrews Place/Mount Garrison junction, access to the parking bays to either side of the carriageway is unrestricted throughout the day.

Walking and Cycling Connectivity

20. Given the Site is centrally located within Hitchin Town Centre, it benefits from immediate access onto the established network of pedestrian footways which connect to nearby bus facilities and the local amenities available within the High Street area to the west of the Site, as well as Hitchin Market, all of which can be easily accessed via modes of active travel, such as walking, wheeling and cycling. This is important for future residents as it will support healthy lifestyles, social interaction and improves air quality to deliver on net zero carbon targets. A significant switch from cars to more sustainable modes of travel will require a shift from the car borne trips to walking, wheeling and cycling seen as 'active' modes of travel" which is a key element of the promotion of these proposals.
21. Footways within the immediate vicinity of the Site are wide, well-lit and in good state of repair, which will help encourage the most vulnerable users to use the infrastructure available. A signalised pedestrian crossing facility, which benefits from dropped kerbs with tactile paving accommodates safe crossing of Queen Street toward the wide range of amenities and services available within a short walk or cycle to the west of the Site. A google maps extract has been shown at **Figure 1.2**, which demonstrates the dense network of footways surrounding the Site and connections between the Site and its surrounding amenities (to the west) facilitated via Churchyard Walk and Churchgate Walk.

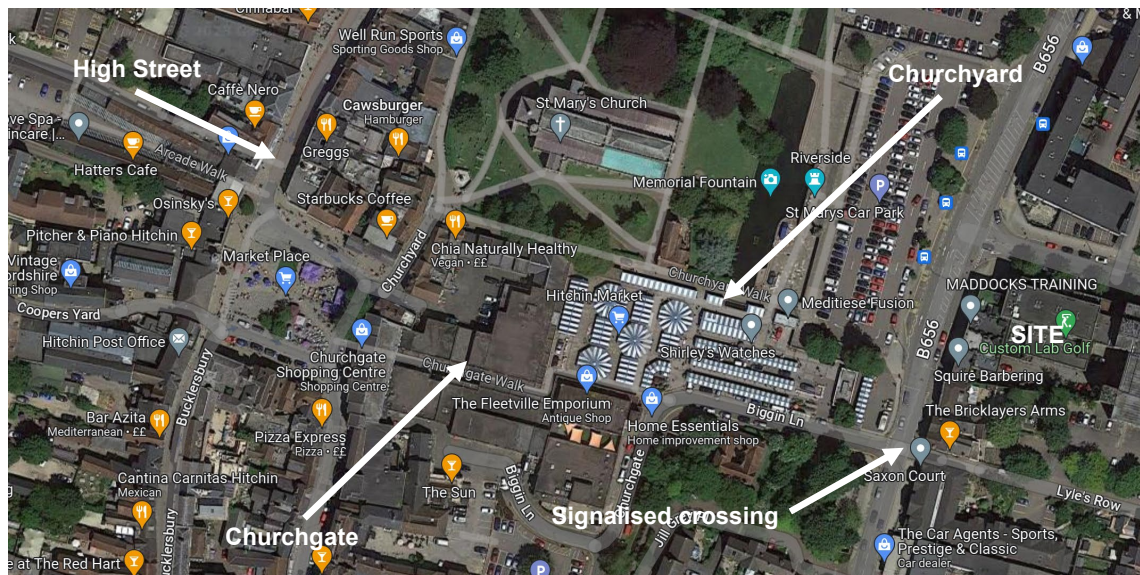


Figure 1.2 – Connectivity to surrounding amenities

22. In addition to the above, further facilities are also available for future residents along Hermitage Road, which can be reached within a 200m walk (3-minute) (or cycle - 1 minute) from the Site. A signalised crossing is available across the southern arm of the 3-arm Queen Street/Hermitage Road junction, enabling safe crossing of Queen Street from its eastern footway in the direction of these facilities.
23. Walking is the most important mode of travel at the local level and has the greatest potential to replace car trips for distances up to 2km. The distance that people are prepared to walk depends on the journey purpose. The Institute of Highways and Transportation (IHT) produced '*Guidelines for Journeys on Foot*' in 2000 which provides 'suggested acceptable walking distances'. The walking thresholds presented in **Table 1.1** are suggested.

Table 1.1 Suggested Acceptable Walking Distances

	Commuting, School and Sightseeing (m)	Elsewhere (m)
Desirable	500	400
Acceptable	1,000	800
Preferred Maximum	2,000	1,200

24. As shown, for commuting, school and sightseeing the 'preferred maximum' walking distance is quoted as 2km. For other purposes, the 'preferred maximum' walking distance is suggested as 1.2km.
25. There are a number of services / amenities available within the vicinity of the Site, which would be accessible by either walking, wheeling or cycling, and therefore reduce the need to travel by the private car. In particular, this includes the Asda Food Store (3 - minute walk/ 1 - minute cycle at 240m to the south), Sainsburys Food Store (7-minutewalk / 2-minute cycle at 600m to the north west) and an abundance of local businesses and high street brands within the High Street and Hermitage Road. The locality of the amenities encourages active travel behaviours and discourage the need to use car borne trips.

26. There are several educational facilities available within an accessible distance of the Site, providing a broad spectrum of educational needs if required by any of the future residents, including Hitchin Boys (8-minute walk/5-minute cycle at 650m from the Site) and separate Hitchin Girls (9-minute walk/4-minute cycle at 600m from the Site) School's with Highbury Infant and Nursery School also within close proximity (5-minute walk/3-minute cycle at 300m from the Site).

Active Travel Walking Promotion

27. The promotion of enabling walking from the Site is set against the ambitious aim of Active Travel, which would like 50% of all journeys in towns and cities should be walked (or cycled) by 2030. This is about enabling more active short journeys within Hitchin that will not only benefit future residents of the site's health but also help with decarbonising and reducing the toxins in the local area to make Hitchin a nicer place to live. As such, putting mechanisms in place to reduce the need to travel by car borne trips and make these trips shorter.
28. This is an important consideration when acknowledging the proposed parking level for the Site, discussed in greater detail in this report. The current thinking is that the NHDC's parking standards are considered excessive given the type of development being promoted which are 29no. studio apartments. Residents have access to local shops and facilities as well public transport hubs within short walking distance and this forms part of the decision to reduce the number of car parking spaces on Site and reduce the over reliance on car borne trips from the development. The proposals will see a reduction in parking spaces being provided as part of the Site and as such will see a reduction in traffic generated compared to the existing commercial uses, which is seen in a positive light of actively encouraging sustainable modes of travel.
29. The strategy for walking is to increase the percentage of short journeys in towns that are walked, wheeled (or cycled) to 50% in 2030 and to 55% in 2035. To further encourage the uptake of walking and wheeling as a journey behaviour the destinations, roads quieter, safer and more attractive for people to walk.
30. The NPPF (December 2024) is broadly supportive of integrating local housing growth and sustainable transport objectives through a spatial planning approach. With NPPF Para. 109 and Para. 110 (Section 9: Promoting Sustainable Transport) stating:

109. Transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals, using a vision-led approach to identify transport solutions that deliver well-designed, sustainable and popular places. This should involve:

a) making transport considerations an important part of early engagement with local communities;

b) ensuring patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes, and contribute to making high quality places;

c) understanding and addressing the potential impacts of development on transport networks;

d) realising opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure, and changing transport technology and usage – for example in relation to the scale, location or density of development that can be accommodated;

e) identifying and pursuing opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use; and

f) identifying, assessing and taking into account the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure – including appropriate opportunities for avoiding and mitigating any adverse effects, and for net environmental gains.

110. The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making.

31. It is therefore sensible that sustainable transport goals from the NPPF (December 2024) are integrated into plans for the Site at an early stage and supports development with the use of sustainable transport wherever feasible and reduces congestion and the environment impact of travel, particularly in Hitchin town centre. It is important however that NHDC (and HCC) are aligning transport strategies with delivering the appropriate level of infrastructure that enable active travel to become a mode of choice and that the urban environment and infrastructure is planned to encourage more walking journeys.
32. In summary, the Site is ideally located to take advantage of the principles of Active Travel by promoting walking, wheeling and cycling and discouraging car borne trips by reducing the number of car parking spaces on Site, which are seen as excessive in the context of proposals to deliver studio apartments.

Public Transport Accessibility

33. Hitchin Train Station is located within a 1km walk, wheel (14-minute) or cycle (4-minute) to the north of the Site. The route for active travel users is direct, following the B656 from the Site toward Station Approach, where a connection can be made into the station facilities. The directness of the routes available make this mode of transport more preferable than using private motor vehicles.
34. This station forms part of the Great Northern Railway network providing frequent trains between towards destinations such as Cambridge, Peterborough and London's Kings Cross. The station benefits from 291 cycle parking spaces which are located close to the station entrance and monitored by CCTV surveillance, enabling future residents of the Application Site to choose to cycle toward the station as part of a multi modal journey.
35. As mentioned in preceding paragraphs, bus stops are available on Queen Street which provide access to a range of local bus services, providing connections to neighbouring settlements such as Luton, St. Albans and Welwyn Garden City.

Summary of Site and Surrounding Area

36. This Section demonstrates that the Site falls within a sustainable location with excellent links to public transport facilities, as well as benefiting from close connections to a wide range of local amenities within the immediate area, and good walking and cycling opportunities.
37. In conclusion, the proposed development provides opportunities to use modes other than car borne trips and will provide all users, particularly residents living at the Site with a good level of access to all alternative modes of travel which is important in establishing a car free scheme at the Site.

Proposed Development

38. The proposals are for the conversion of flexible Class E use space (<1,500m²) located on the Site's lower ground floor (basement) into 6no. studio (1 person) apartments under *Part 3, Schedule 2, Class MA of GDPO* as shown in **Figure 1.3**. The 24 studios that form part of **The Exchange** as part of 24/02058/FP have been approved.

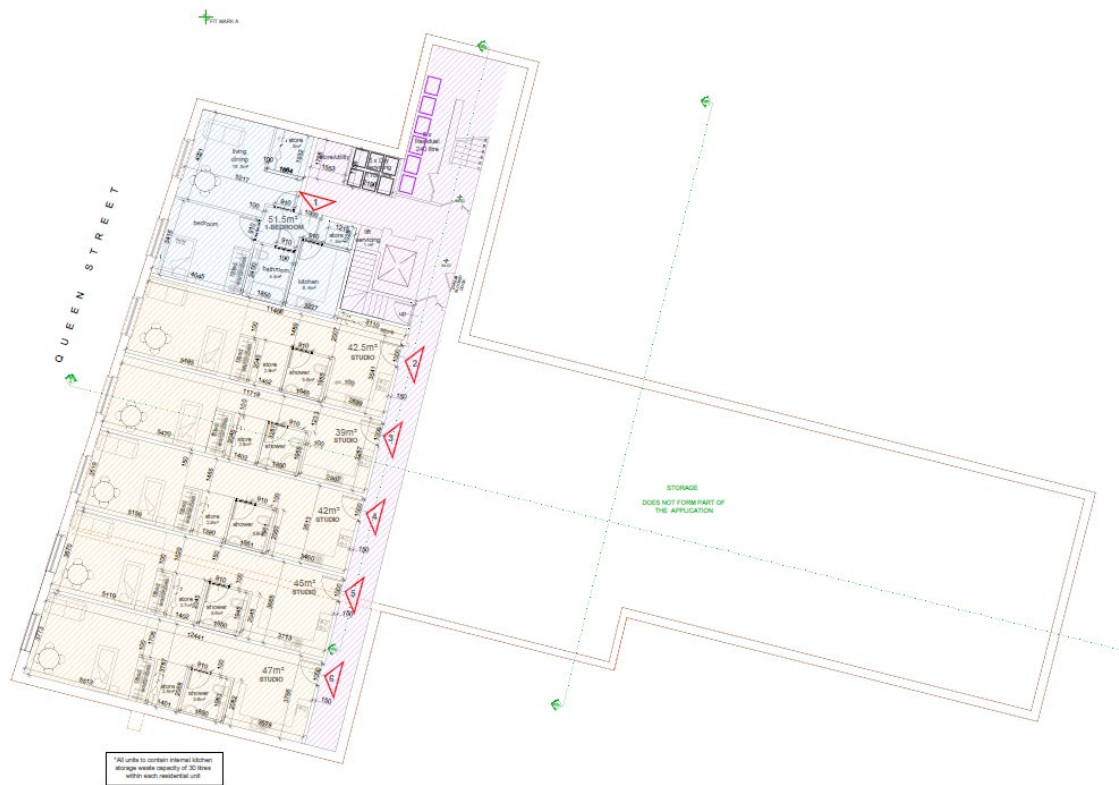


Figure 1.3 Site Proposals

Access

39. Given the car-free proposals, as detailed later in this Section, vehicular access to the Proposed Development is only required for delivery, servicing, and emergency vehicles.
40. The existing undercroft access via Hollow Lane will therefore continue to be the principal access for servicing and emergency vehicles to the Site. This access point into the building can be seen highlighted with a green arrow within **Figure 1.4**. It is therefore proposed that delivery and servicing arrangements are expected to remain consistent with the existing situation for the extant use. Given the reduction in car parking on Site, it is expected that the existing access will see a reduction in vehicular movements, particularly within the AM and PM peak, compared with the existing gym use.



Figure 1.4 Existing Access (for Service and Emergency Vehicles)

Car Parking

41. As detailed extensively within this Note, the Site is in a highly sustainable location, benefitting from both bus and rail services within its immediate vicinity providing an extensive range of services to a wide number of destinations, along with excellent connections for walking and cycling. The use of bus and rail, particularly for residents living in studio apartments, will ensure these facilities provide excellent opportunities to travel without the need to use a private vehicle such as a car. Should the private car be required for visitors from less accessible locations, then the site is located adjacent to St. Marys Car Park, which provides 24-hour access and takes access from Queen Street and privately owned public car parks which offer temporary parking options for visitors of the Site.
42. In addition to that, and as discussed previously the position of the Site within the town centre ensures that a substantial range of services / amenities are available within a very short distance. As noted, 2km and 5km are the distances commonly acknowledge for walking, wheeling and cycling trips respectively.
43. It is therefore considered that this Site is suitable to be a car-free scheme and therefore no car parking spaces are proposed for this development.
44. In addition, cycle parking will be provided in the form of a secure two-tier rack system within the surface level service yard to the rear of the building and comprise 30no. cycle parking spaces in accordance with standards (1 space per studio, including the 6no studios in this application), to ensure that all residents of the studio apartments will be able to use their bike to travel should they wish to. An additional 2no. short stay visitor spaces are to be provided in the form of 1no. Sheffield Stand immediately adjacent to the two-tier rack facility.
45. Further to this, it is proposed that a dedicated area is provided within the curtilage of each individual unit to store a cycle, with access to units provided on the mezzanine level accommodated via the lift facility at the northwest corner of the building (as per approval 24/02058/FP).

46. The location of this cycle provision can be seen in green, within **Figure 1.5**.

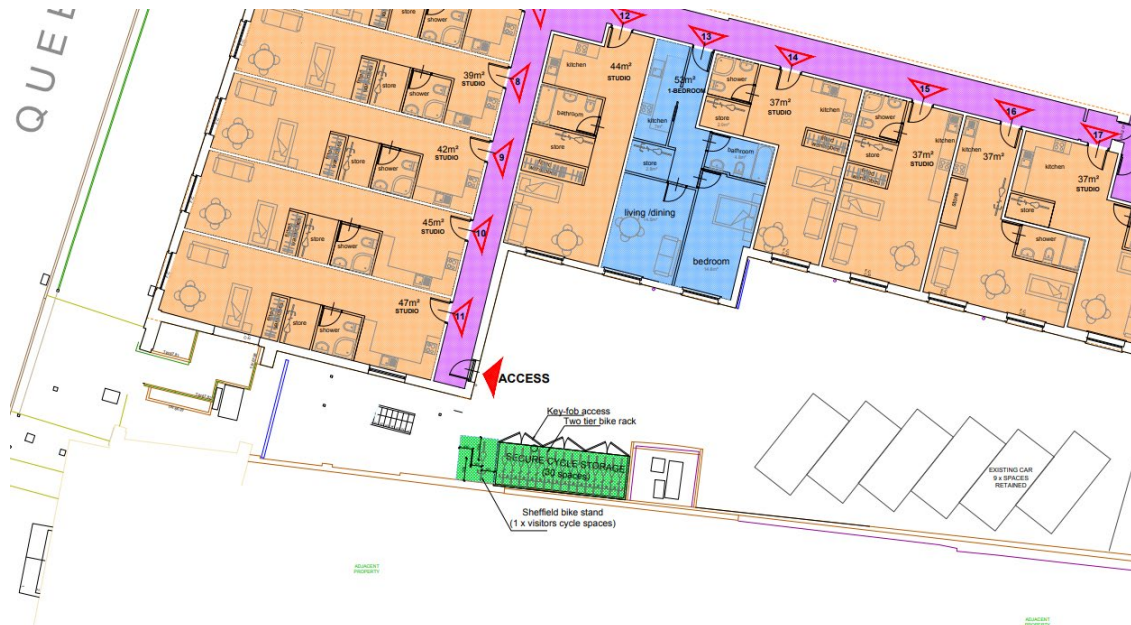


Figure 1.5 Location of proposed cycle parking facilities (As per approval 24/02058/FP)

47. In summary, it is considered that the proposals for a car-free scheme are suitable given the context of the Site, and this will help to encourage a shift towards more sustainable forms of travel and in accordance with the principles of Active Travel.

Trip Generation

48. Given the car-free proposals, it is considered that the vehicular trip generation associated with the Proposed Development will be minimal, with trips being associated with the small number of servicing trips.
49. In reality the gym spaces would have generated more trips (including private parking in the adjacent multi storey car park) than the proposed change to residential use.
50. For the purpose of consistency, notwithstanding the proposals are not providing car parking on Site, it can therefore be seen from the trip generation assessment that the proposals will not result in a material increase or a material change in the character of traffic in the vicinity of the Site. In reality it will be opposite and there will be a reduction in vehicle movements as a result of the proposals. The proposals therefore encourage Active Travel principles and ensure that behaviours towards car borne trips are reduced and replaced by pedestrian and cycle trips.
51. There will be a substantial net reduction in vehicular trips onto the adjacent network is anticipated as a result of the proposals. In addition, servicing trips will be deemed negligible and will not be discernible from the existing traffic levels.
52. Therefore, in summary, the Site is expected to result in a significant decrease of two-way daily trips associated with car borne trips when compared to the extant use. This should be seen in the context of the PDR and that this will not result in a material increase or change in traffic levels, particularly in relation to paragraph 116 of the NPPF, which states *“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.”*