

PLANNING  
DEPARTMENT

14 AUG 2013

2013 / 1785

## **Design & Access Statement**

**Change of use with accompanying External & Internal Alterations to Listed Building**

**Chequers House, 1-5 Park Street, Hatfield, Herts, AL9 5AT**

**By**

**Contour Planning Services**

On behalf of

RD Stephens (Consultancy Services) Ltd Retirement Benefit Scheme

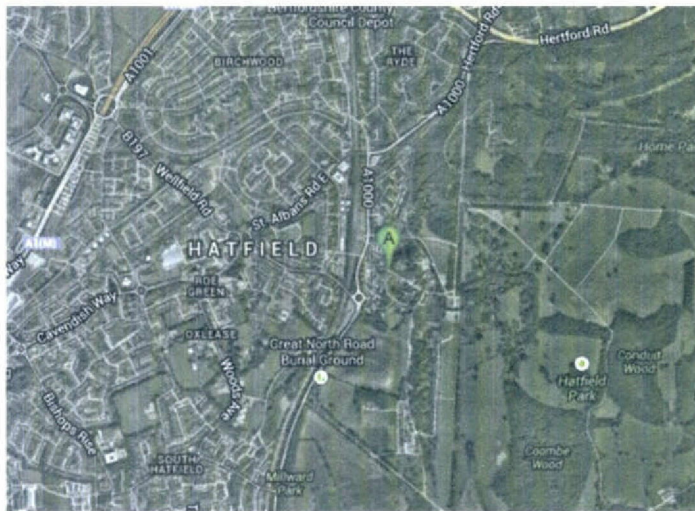
## Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in accordance with guidance set out in Circular 01/2006, and has had regard to the CABE guidance document 'Design and Access Statements' 2006. It provides an outline of the proposed development in relation to design and physical characteristics, and means of access. It also highlights how compliance with relevant planning policy in relation to design and access considerations, would be achieved.

This Statement forms part of the planning application & application for Listed Building Consent submission at Chequers House, Park Street, Old Hatfield, AL9 7HF.

## Site Context

The application site is Chequers House, which is located within a prominent position along the western side of Park Street (nos 1-5), within the historic heart of Old Hatfield village centre, a distinct village to the east side of Hatfield new town



Old Hatfield has the characteristics of a large village centre. It is recognised within the District Plan as retaining some aspects of a 'Large Village Centre', but not performing exactly the same function as it also serves the business community as well as local residents. The site is also within the boundary of a Conservation Area. Surrounding uses reflect its unique location and include residential accommodation, commercial and retail use.

The application site is identified on the illustration below [Note: The red line is indicative of site location and does not represent the red line boundary of the application site area for the purposes of the planning application or LBC submission].



## The Property

The application property is a C17 former terrace of houses with a ground floor corner retail unit. The Principle elevation facing Park Street comprises a painted pebble-dashed facade with a retail shop front on the western corner of Park Street and Salisbury Square.



The building is a traditional timber framed building, comprising of 2 storeys with the left hand end having a slightly projecting hipped roof. It benefits from flush sash windows to the majority of the building (with the exception of the glazing panels that constitute the window display of the retail unit on the corner of the property). The corner separate entrance door to the retail unit is framed by two wooden columns.



There are two other entrances from Park Street to the remainder of the property, one towards the centre and one at the opposite end from the shop, both of which are timber doors with timber surrounds. The roof line of the property is dominated by a large, almost central chimney stack.

As referred to above, the property originally dates back to 17<sup>th</sup> Century and has been used in the past as two separate buildings (1-3 Park Street & 5 Park Street – hence the two separate external doors), but has in the past been used as one office. The property is constructed over ground and first floor with a basement area.

The ground floor comprises a reception area together with several individual offices suites and the first floor is made up of eight individual office suites. There is currently 2,740 sqft (254.4 sqm) of net useable area. In addition, the basement area is circa 455 sqft (42.3 sqm).

Prior to the submission of this application, the owners of the building and their agents have been actively marketing the property for many months but have not received any offers by operators wishing to maintain the property as office accommodation. Accordingly, the property has become unviable for its continued use and consequently the owners wish to bring this historic asset back into active use through this application submission.

#### Proposed Development

It is clear from an inspection of the property, together with the Council's planning records for the site, that the building has already been amended and altered internally so that few of its original internal features remain intact. As such, the floor plan of the building is unlikely to represent that of the original layout, following the internal alterations that have occurred to this commercial building over the years to accommodate various business occupier's needs.

Accordingly, the intention is to bring this historic property back into viable use, whilst retaining the historically important and valued features of the building, which in this case appear to be centred upon the building's external appearance.

Accordingly, this application is for the conversion of the majority of this property (with the exception of the ground floor retail unit), together with general external improvements, in order to facilitate the change of use of this property from the previous use as a vacant office building (with ground floor corner retail unit) currently falling within Use Class B1 to create quality residential accommodation comprising four separate residential units.

The proposed floorplans submitted in support of this application demonstrate that the following accommodation can be achieved through this conversion:

- Ground Floor – One 1 Bed Unit & the ground floor of a 3 bed duplex apartment
- First Floor – One 2 Bed Unit & One 1 Bed Unit & the upper floor of the duplex apartment.

The existing doorway from Park Street will be used for the proposed conversion, which results in their being no requirement to create additional access on the front facade.

The existing central access door onto Park Street, will become the main entrance for two of the four units. It will open up to an entrance lobby with communal storage and WC and contains stairs which lead down to the basement storage area, which is intended for cycle storage, for all residents.

Internal secure access is also taken from this entrance lobby to the ground floor of the three bedroom, central duplex unit. This unit has storage, living room/kitchen, WC and one of the three bedrooms on the ground floor. An internal staircase to the rear leads up to the other two bedrooms and bathroom of this duplex unit, which are situated at first floor level.

The existing access from Park Street on the right hand side of the building will be used to gain entry to both 1 bed units, one on the ground floor and one on the first floor. Access to the former will be gained from the internal entrance lobby and the latter via an internal staircase on the right hand boundary of the property.

The remaining 2 bed unit is accessed from within a new staircase that is proposed within the existing enclosed courtyard to the rear of the property on the right hand side, behind the retail unit. This unit extends above the existing retail unit at first floor level.

All of the proposed habitable rooms have been designed to include existing window openings with the bathrooms, circulation space and storage areas have been designed to accommodate within areas of the property without windows.

Only one new window is proposed. This is to ensure there is natural light to the lounge area of the first floor one bed unit on the Right Hand side. However, this new opening is on the rear elevations facing the industrial units to the rear of the property and as such would not have any demonstrable impact on the external appearance of the property, the character of the Conservation Area or indeed the integrity of this Listed Building.

There is no change to the roof and the only proposed change to the basement area is the relocation of an existing staircase to the first floor to enable the communal access from the main entrance lobby to the proposed cycle storage at basement level.

Whilst the proposal will result in some removal of existing internal walls and the creation of new staircases etc to create the space and secure internal access required for each unit, this work will be done as sympathetically as possible. Namely, the contractors will ensure that the interior of the external boundary walls will be retained in their original state (if of historic value) and any examples of original coving or cornicing would be retained wherever possible.

Also proposed is the making good of all the stone and masonry work throughout the facade of the building and the sensitive repair of any external windows that are found to be in a poor state.

As can be seen from the list of alterations above, the proposed alterations have been kept to a minimum to ensure that the integrity of the external appearance of this building, as confirmed in the Listing Notice, are retained and enhanced where possible. In doing so, the building would remain of the same physical scale, particularly when viewed from its main elevation from Park Street, with the main changes to the building being internal and as such not visible from the surrounding area.

## Design and Access Considerations

The following section is broken down to demonstrate how the development proposal complies with requirements in terms of the use; layout; scale and appearance, contained within the guidance outlined in Circular 01/2006, and the CABE guidance document 'Design and Access Statements' 2006.

### Use

The sensitive conversion of this existing commercial building to its original residential use is wholly in accordance with the principles contained within both the NPPF and adopted and emerging local planning policies.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages the provision of more housing within towns and other specified settlements and encourages the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land).

Furthermore, the application site is situated within the town of Hatfield as outlined in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005. This site has previously been developed and currently

consists of a long-term vacant office building which has not been contributing to the community for some time, therefore, meeting the requirements relating to the effective use of previously developed land.

Also, of relevance is that the Council has recently consulted on its 'Housing Targets' policies, which included the key theme of bringing unused properties forward. It was accepted that both existing residential and commercial, should be brought back into use for housing, before new homes are built across Welwyn Hatfield.

Notwithstanding the above, the recent change in Permitted Development Rights, the principle of the change of use from vacant offices (Use Class B1) to Residential (Use Class C3) does not now require justification (with the exception of a brief explanation that the proposal would not give rise to any issues of traffic impact, contamination or flooding). It is only because the application property is listed that there is a requirement for this application to be submitted.

We therefore consider that the principle of the proposed use is established.

### **Layout**

All of the proposed habitable rooms have been designed to include existing window openings with the bathrooms, circulation space and storage areas have been designed to accommodate within areas of the property without windows.

### **Amount & Scale**

The scale of the building would not change as a result of the proposal and therefore is entirely acceptable. The size of residential accommodation proposed is fully compliant with design standards and as such is also considered acceptable.

### **Appearance**

The heritage value of the building is largely attributed to its external appearance and its contribution to the streetscape facing onto Park Street. The proposed works will not affect this appearance, bar the introduction of a modest window to the rear of the property. Consequently the external appearance of the most sensitive elevation, the front facade, will not be demonstrably altered from its existing appearance.

The new window is to ensure there is natural light to the lounge area of the first floor one bed unit on the Right Hand side. However, this new opening is on the rear elevations facing

the industrial units to the rear of the property and as such would not have any demonstrable impact on the external appearance of the property, the character of the Conservation Area or indeed the integrity of this Listed Building.

In summary, the scheme has been sympathetically designed to ensure maximum protection of amenity and would, in our view, improve the visual appearance of the site. As such the proposed development is in full accordance with design policies contained within the relevant Development Plan.

### **Access**

There are already excellent existing pedestrian and cycling networks within close proximity of the site. There are continuous footways and street lighting provided on both sides of Park Street, linking the application site to the rest of the centre and to the surrounding residential areas and train station beyond.

The proposed units would not have any dedicated car parking spaces, given their location within the heart of the Old Hatfield and their proximity to sufficient off-street public car parking and alternative forms of public transport, namely Hatfield Train Station which is a 3 min walk away.

We therefore consider that the application site is sufficiently sustainable to warrant a car free development. Notwithstanding, the proposal does also include the conversion of an existing basement to create a secure cycle storage area which could be accessed by all residents.

### **Conclusions**

The design of the proposal has had close attention to the requirements set out in Circular 01/2006, as well as the CABE guidance document 'Design and Access Statements' 2006. We have also fully considered national, regional and local policy to finalise the scheme hereby submitted.

It is considered that this development proposal incorporates a high standard of design and access and fully complies with necessary requirements set out in relevant local policy. As such, we consider it entirely appropriate for the proposal to be granted planning permission and Listed Building Consent.