

Fusion Hatfield Hotels Ltd

Refurbishment and extension of the Grade II Listed Building (Use Class C1), including demolition of poor quality additions. Erection of a new high quality student accommodation (Sui Generis), landscaping and associated works.

August 2016



# HERITAGE STATEMENT

COMET HOTEL, HATFIELD

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# Quality Assurance

Site name: **Comet Hotel, Hatfield**

Client name: **Fusion Hatfield Hotels Ltd**

Type of report: **Heritage Statement**

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Date: **15 August 2016**

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Signed:

Date: **22 August 2016**



# 1. Introduction

This Heritage Statement has been prepared on behalf of Fusion Hatfield Hotels Ltd to accompany applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent relating to the Comet Hotel, Hatfield.

The description of the development is as follows: *“Refurbishment and extension of the Grade II Listed Building (Use Class C1), including demolition of poor quality additions. Erection of a new high quality student accommodation (Sui Generis), landscaping and associated works.”*

The Comet Hotel is included on the Statutory List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest in Grade II.

Through the process of Significance Assessment, the relative heritage value of the existing building has been analysed, providing a clear framework from the outset for the designers to respond with sympathetic development proposals and alterations.

This document also includes an Impact Assessment which considers the potential impact of the proposed development on that value, including impacts on setting.

Both the Significance Assessment and Impact Assessment assist in satisfying the provisions of Sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) where the impact of development on a heritage asset or its setting is being considered (Paragraphs 128-135).

The document has been prepared by Chris Surfleet MA MSc PGDipUD IHBC, Head of Heritage and Kate Hannelly MSc BSc (Hons), Principal Heritage & Design.



Location map identifying the Comet Hotel

## 2. Heritage Policy and Guidance Summary

### Legislation

The primary legislation relating to Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas is set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

- Section 16(2) states *“In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.”*
- Section 66(1) reads: *“In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.”*
- In relation to Conservation Areas, Section 72(1) reads: *“Special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.”*

### National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27th March 2012. The over-arching aim of the policy, expressed in the Ministerial foreword, is that *“our historic environments... can better be cherished if their spirit of place thrives, rather than withers.”*

The NPPF directs local planning authorities to require an applicant to *“describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting”* and the level of detailed assessment should be *“proportionate to the assets’ importance”* (Paragraph 128).

This gives rise to the need for a Significance Assessment which identifies and then sets out the relative nature and value of affected heritage assets. It also stresses the importance of proportionality both in the extent to which

assessments are carried out and in the recognising the relative merits of the assets. Planning Authorities should then *“take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal”* (Paragraph 129). This paragraph results in the need for an analysis of the impact of a proposed development on the asset’s relative significance, in the form of a Heritage Impact Assessment.

Paragraph 132 of the NPPF states that *“When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.”*

In relation to harmful impacts or the loss of significance resulting from a development proposal, Paragraph 133 states the following:

*“Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:*

- *the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and*
- *no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and*
- *conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*
- *the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.”*

It is also possible for proposals, where suitably designed, to result in no harm to the significance of heritage assets, and also for them to be beneficial in effect.

In the case of non-designated heritage assets, Paragraph 135 requires a Local Planning Authority to make a “*balanced judgement*” having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

The NPPF therefore recognises the need to clearly identify relative significance at an early stage and then to judge the impact of development proposals in that context.

### National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) was published in March 2014 as a companion to the NPPF, replacing a large number of foregoing Circulars and other supplementary guidance.

In respect of heritage decision-making, the NPPG stresses the importance of determining applications on the basis of significance, and explains how the tests of harm and impact within the NPPF are to be interpreted.

In particular, the NPPG notes the following in relation to the evaluation of harm: “*In determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest.*” (Ref ID: 18a-017-20140306)

This guidance therefore provides assistance in defining where levels of harm should be set, tending to emphasise substantial harm as a “*high*

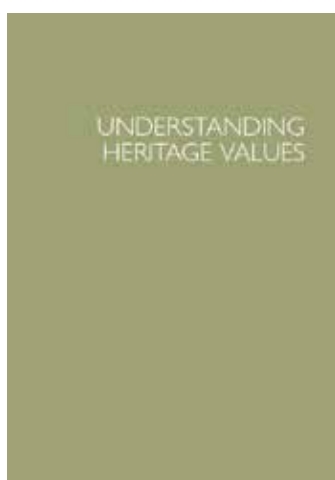
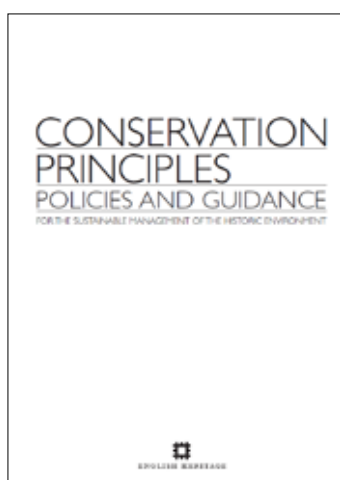
*test*”.

### English Heritage ‘Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance’ 2008.

Historic England (formerly English Heritage) sets out in this document a logical approach to making decisions and offering guidance about all aspects of England’s historic environment, including changes affecting significant places. It advises that the contribution made by setting and context should be considered when assessing heritage significance. Paragraph 76 explains as follows:

*“Setting’ is an established concept that relates to the surroundings in which a place is experienced, its local context, embracing present and past relationships to the adjacent landscape. Definition of the setting of a significant place will normally be guided by the extent to which material change within it could affect (enhance or diminish) the place’s significance”* (page 39).

It also states that: “*New work or alteration to a significant place should normally be acceptable if:* a. *there is sufficient information comprehensively to understand the impacts of the proposal on the significance of the place;* b. *the proposal would not materially harm the values of the place, which, where appropriate, would be reinforced or further revealed;* c. *the proposals aspire to a quality of design and execution which may be valued now and in the future;* d. *the long-term consequences of the proposals can, from experience, be demonstrated to be benign, or the proposals are designed not to prejudice alternative solutions in the future”* (page 59).



English Heritage Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance 2008



## **Making Changes to Heritage Assets: Historic England Advice Note 2 (February 2016)**

This advice note provides information on repair, restoration, addition and alteration works to heritage assets. It advises that *“The main issues to consider in proposals for additions to heritage assets, including new development in conservation areas, aside from NPPF requirements such as social and economic activity and sustainability, are proportion, height, massing, bulk, use of materials, durability and adaptability, use, enclosure, relationship with adjacent assets and definition of spaces and streets, alignment, active frontages, permeability and treatment of setting.”* (page 10)

## **Historic England: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice (GPA) in Planning Note 2 (March 2015)**

This advice note, *‘Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment’*, sets out clear information to assist all relevant stake holders in implementing historic environment policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the related guidance given in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

*“These include; assessing the significance of heritage assets, using appropriate expertise, historic environment records, recording and furthering understanding, neglect and unauthorised works, marketing and design and distinctiveness.”* (page 1)

## **Historic England: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (March 2015)**

This document presents guidance on managing change within the settings of heritage assets, including archaeological remains and historic buildings, sites, areas and landscapes.

Page 6, entitled: *‘A staged approach to proportionate decision taking’* provides detailed advice on assessing the implications of development proposals and recommends the following broad approach to assessment, undertaken as a series of steps that apply equally to complex or more straightforward cases:

- *“Step 1 - identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected;*

- *Step 2 - assess whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s);*
- *Step 3 - assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance;*
- *Step 4 - explore the way maximizing enhancement and avoiding or minimizing harm;*
- *Step 5 - make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.”*

## **English Heritage: Seeing the History in the View (June 2012)**

This document explains how the heritage significance of views can be assessed in a systematic and consistent way. It highlights a ten step process, split into two phases, to identify and assess the significance and impact on specific and formal views.

### **Phase A:**

Step 1 – Establishing reasons for identifying a particular view as important;

- *Step 2 – Identifying which heritage assets in a view merit consideration;*
- *Step 3 – Assessing the significance of individual heritage assets;*
- *Step 4 – Assessing the overall heritage significance in a view;*
- *Step 5 – How can heritage significance be sustained*

### **Phase B:**

- *Step 6 – Identifying the importance of the assets and the view*
- *Step 7 - Assessing the magnitude of impact on individual heritage assets*
- *Step 8 - Assessing the magnitude of the cumulative impact of proposals on heritage*
- *Step 9 – Determining the overall impact*
- *Step 10 – identifying ways of mitigating the impact of development.*

## **Welwyn Hatfield District Plan**

The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan was adopted by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council in April 2005. The majority of the policies were saved in April 2008. The Local Plan, which will gradually replace the District Plan saved policies, finished its public consultation in March 2015 and the final plan is now being produced.

The policies within the existing District Plan which are relevant to the current application are policies R27, D1 and D2.

### **Policy R27: Demolition of Listed Buildings**

*“Listed Building Consent for the complete or partial demolition of any building of special architectural or historic interest will not be granted other than in the following exceptional circumstances:*

*(i) Clear and convincing evidence has been provided that it is not practicable to continue to use the building for its present or previous use and that no viable alternative uses can be found, and that preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible;*

*(ii) The physical condition of the building has deteriorated, to a point that it can be demonstrated that demolition is essential in the interests of public safety. A comprehensive structural report will be required to support this criterion;*

*(iii) Demolition or major alteration will not be considered without acceptable detailed plans for the site’s development. Conditions will be imposed in order to ensure a contractual obligation has been entered into for the construction of the replacement building(s) and / or the landscaping of the site prior to the commencement of demolition; and*

*(iv) Where, exceptionally, consent is granted for the demolition or major alteration to a listed building, before any demolition or major alteration takes place, applicants will be required to record details of the building by measured drawings, text and photographs, and this should be submitted to and agreed by the Council.”*

### **Policy D1: Quality of Design**

*“The Council will require the standard of design in all new development to be of a high quality. The design of new development should incorporate the design principles and policies in the Plan and the guidance contained in the Supplementary Design Guidance.”*

### **Policy D2: Character and Context**

*“The Council will require all new development to respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed. Development proposals should as a minimum maintain, and where possible,*



### 3. Methodology

The overall aim of this Heritage Statement is to identify and assess any impacts that the proposed development may cause to the value or significance of surrounding heritage assets and/or their settings.

Impact is determined by considering the sensitivity of the receptors identified and the magnitude of change to its significance. Table 1 sets out the definition of the level of significance/value that will be assigned to each receptor identified.

**Table 1 - Assessing heritage significance/ value**

VALUE	EXAMPLES
<b>High</b>	<p>World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments of exceptional quality, or assets of acknowledged international importance or can contribute to international research objectives.</p> <p>Grade I and Grade II* Listed Buildings and built heritage of exceptional quality.</p> <p>Grade I and Grade II* Registered Parks and Gardens and historic landscapes and townscapes of international sensitivity, or extremely well preserved historic landscapes and townscapes with exceptional coherence, integrity, time-depth, or other critical factor(s).</p>
<b>Good</b>	<p>Scheduled Monuments, or assets of national quality and importance or that can contribute to national research objectives.</p> <p>Grade II* and Grade II Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas with very strong character and integrity, other built heritage that can be shown to have exceptional qualities in their fabric or historical association.</p> <p>Grade II* and II Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields and historic landscapes and townscapes of outstanding interest, quality and importance, or well preserved and exhibiting considerable coherence, integrity time-depth or other critical factor(s).</p>
<b>Medium/ Moderate</b>	<p>Grade II Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, locally listed buildings and undesignated assets that can be shown to have good qualities in their fabric or historical association.</p> <p>Grade II Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields, undesignated special historic landscapes and townscapes with reasonable coherence, integrity, time-depth or other critical factor(s).</p>
<b>Low</b>	<p>Assets compromised by poor preservation and/or poor survival of contextual associations but with potential to contribute to local research objectives.</p> <p>Historic buildings or structures of modest quality in their fabric or historical association. Locally-listed buildings and undesignated assets of moderate/ low quality.</p> <p>Historic landscapes and townscapes with limited sensitivity or whose sensitivity is limited by poor preservation, historic integrity and/or poor survival of contextual associations.</p>
<b>Negligible/ none</b>	<p>Assets with no surviving cultural heritage interest. Buildings of no architectural or historical note.</p> <p>Landscapes and townscapes with no surviving legibility and/or contextual associations, or with no historic interest.</p>

Once the value of an asset has been assessed, the next stage is to determine the ‘magnitude’ of the impact brought about by the development proposals. This impact could be a direct physical impact on the assets itself or an impact on its wider setting, or both. Table 2 sets out the levels of impact that may occur and whether they can be considered adverse or beneficial.

**Table 2: Assessing magnitude of impact**

MAGNITUDE OF IMPACT	TYPICAL CRITERIA DESCRIPTORS
<b>Very High</b>	<p><b>Adverse:</b> Impacts will destroy cultural heritage assets resulting in their total loss or almost complete destruction.</p> <p><b>Beneficial:</b> The proposals would remove or successfully mitigate existing and significant damaging and discordant impacts on assets; allow for the substantial restoration or enhancement of characteristic features.</p>
<b>High</b>	<p><b>Adverse:</b> Impacts will damage cultural heritage assets; result in the loss of the asset’s quality and integrity; cause severe damage to key characteristic features or elements; almost complete loss of setting and/or context of the asset. The assets integrity or setting is almost wholly destroyed or is severely compromised, such that the resource can no longer be appreciated or understood.</p> <p><b>Beneficial:</b> The proposals would remove or successfully mitigate existing damaging and discordant impacts on assets; allow for the restoration or enhancement of characteristic features; allow the substantial re-establishment of the integrity, understanding and setting for an area or group of features; halt rapid degradation and/or erosion of the heritage resource, safeguarding substantial elements of the heritage resource.</p>
<b>Medium</b>	<p><b>Adverse:</b> Moderate impact on the asset, but only partially affecting the integrity; partial loss of, or damage to, key characteristics, features or elements; substantially intrusive into the setting and/or would adversely impact upon the context of the asset; loss of the asset for community appreciation. The assets integrity or setting is damaged but not destroyed so understanding and appreciation is compromised.</p> <p><b>Beneficial:</b> Benefit to, or partial restoration of, key characteristics, features or elements; improvement of asset quality; degradation of the asset would be halted; the setting and/or context of the asset would be enhanced and understanding and appreciation is substantially improved; the asset would be brought into community use.</p>
<b>Minor/Low</b>	<p><b>Adverse:</b> Some measurable change in assets quality or vulnerability; minor loss of or alteration to, one (or maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements; change to the setting would not be overly intrusive or overly diminish the context; community use or understanding would be reduced. The assets integrity or setting is damaged but understanding and appreciation would only be diminished not compromised.</p> <p><b>Beneficial:</b> Minor benefit to, or partial restoration of, one (maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements; some beneficial impact on asset or a stabilisation of negative impacts; slight improvements to the context or setting of the site; community use or understanding and appreciation would be enhanced.</p>
<b>Negligible</b>	Barely discernible change in baseline conditions
<b>Nil</b>	No discernible change in baseline conditions.



## 4. Historic Context

Described as a ‘pioneer hotel in the modern style’,<sup>1</sup> the Grade II listed Comet Hotel in Hatfield was constructed in 1933-1936 to designs by Ernest Brander Musman (1888-1972) for the Benskins (Watford) Brewery Ltd. Built on plan in the shape of an aeroplane, the structure is steel framed with brick and stone dressings, and incorporates geometric shapes and sharp lines which are entirely characteristic of the Art Deco architecture of the period. In its original incarnation it might be considered an example of a Gesamtkunstwerk – describing a complete work of art in which the architecture, landscape, interior finishes and fabrics were overseen by the same architect. That ‘completeness’ has, however, been lost.

Musman’s public houses and hotels can be understood within the context of greater reliance on the motorcar, and early designs borne out of the ‘prohibitionist urge [which] triggered a great resurgence in pub design and building: when the state began to run the brewing industry in Carlisle in 1916, it permitted unhampered experiments in many directions, but especially in the evolution of the public house’<sup>2</sup>.

His ‘most famous pubs are *The Comet in Hatfield (1936) and the Nag’s Head near Bishops Stortford (1934)*. Both of these use the streamline modern style to its fullest, featuring curves, and glass

*and steel details to bring some of the Modern Movement to roadside hostelry. But most of Musman’s designs were not as radical as [this] pair of buildings’.*<sup>3</sup>

This innovative, idiosyncratic style was not enough, however, to prevent the demolition of The Hog in the Pound public house on South Molton Street, London, in 2011 (decision made by City of Westminster in 2009 ).<sup>4</sup>

This, a later and unlisted work of 1959-1960, had been cleverly designed by Musman (in collaboration with Cousins) as a three-storey brick and glass edifice with projecting first floor on a difficult site plan termed a ‘streamlined prow’<sup>5</sup> by Pevsner. Its demolition, and replacement exemplifies the attitude towards the early to mid-20th century public houses in the modern style perhaps seen as less representative of the English ideal, yet which ironically – especially in the instance of Musman’s architecture – incorporated local detail in their pioneering designs.

Indeed, a survey of listed modern public houses of the early 20th century suggests that overwhelmingly, the vast majority are traditional in

<sup>3</sup> - Modernism in Metroland website; author’s comments

<sup>4</sup> - City of Westminster Planning Department, Reference 09/00992, May 2009; redevelopment as residential, office and retail units

<sup>5</sup> - Pevsner, Nikolaus, & Bradley, Simon, *The Buildings of England – Westminster*, 2003, p574

<sup>1</sup> - Historic England, List Entry July 1981

<sup>2</sup> - Boak, Jessica & Bailey, Ray, blog re *The Renaissance of the English Public House*, 1947, by Basil Oliver





*The Bull and Butcher at Whetstone by Ernest Brander Musman*  
RIBA Drawings Collection, PA 353

style (*'the traditional pub appears to be favoured'*<sup>6</sup>), and that Musman's schemes, along with those by Oliver Hill (Prospect Inn, Minster, Kent of 1939) and others are the exception.

And that very few survive; fewer still with original interiors: the Nag's Head at Bishops Stortford by Musman and which predates the Comet by two years, retains some of its features, including marble fireplaces – but its private bar had already been removed, prior to its undergoing an albeit sensitively implemented refurbishment in 2010 with new *'30's style dark wood tables and chairs...'*<sup>7</sup> Many of Musman's schemes, which were predominantly established around London and the Home Counties, seem to have been forgotten – especially those which were not listed – but the compilation of his drawings at the RIBA reveals several exceptional works which validate his reputation for authentic, brilliant architectural interpretation.

These include The Greyhound in Wembley, the Scottish baronial-influenced Berkeley Arms at Cranford, and the Dutch-gabled Bull & Butcher at Whetstone, each of the same 1930s period, and engendered by the inter-war changes in suburban population growth, and changes in attitude towards abstemiousness. Thus, any residual fabric, any decorative schemes, architecture and plan form of these public houses and hotels, designed in the moderne style by architects who were often not British, but émigrés fleeing oppression, should be viewed as a rare endurance; any proposed drastic

changes to these structures should be given much consideration.

## Sources

Ernest Brander Musman, based first at Hampstead in 1913, then at 7, Carteret Street, Westminster, from 1930, had been educated in London. Elected as Fellow of the RIBA in 1936, he was also known for his artistic aptitude, and often exhibited at the Architectural Association. His collection of drawings, including those of the Comet Hotel, is held by the RIBA<sup>8</sup>, along with unpublished material; among his other commissions is the Kings Arms Inn at Amersham in Buckinghamshire ('design for restoration'), The Nag's Head at Bishop Stortford (again, for Benskins Brewery, and his only other listed building – Grade II), and The Oaks ('design for conversion of existing buildings into two detached houses').

The RIBA holds several collections of photographs (available to view from September 2015) including those taken of The White Knight Public House, Crawley by Musman and Cousens (BM/REC/17); and The Mill at Mill Hill in London (photographed by Colin Westwood, 1956; CWN 56W/7454-7468). The collections also include 'photos of The Comet collected by Martin Shaw Briggs, 1920-1955' (30069-30094).

Benskin's Watford Brewery manuscripts comprising minutes, annual reports and accounts from 1948 to 1965 are held at the Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, along with deeds from the 17th century onwards, as well as correspondence, reports and plans (ACC 3928) from the 1850s to the 1970s (although The Comet is apparently not among them). The records of the de Havilland Aircraft Factory at Hatfield are held at the Royal Air Force Museum, Department of Research, and comprise design and corporate records from 1920-1961. Further papers are held at the Imperial War Museum. Secondary sources include Basil Oliver's *The Renaissance of the English Public House of 1947* (*'this book is an event, because it is the best and most authoritative account of a continuing transformation... He is more than architect; for him the public-house is a unit of which every component part is important and must justify itself...'*<sup>9</sup>), as well as several editions of *Architect and Building News*, the *Architects' Journal* and the

6 - Musman, E.B. et al, Pubs Today in *The Architect and Building News*, October 14th 1959, p300

7 - Kirby, John Kinnersley, *Bishop's Stortford & Thorley – A History and Guide*, 2004: website

8 - Located at the RIBA Study Room, V&A Museum; PA354/4 (1-11); and PA353

9 - *Civilised Taverns*, *The Spectator Archive*, 2nd October 1947, p24



Side elevation of *The Comet*: geometric brilliance  
 Taken from *The Architect and Building News*, January 1937,  
 p96

RIBA Journal published between the 1930s and 1950s.

### Listed Buildings and Conservation Area

The Comet was designated Grade II listed status in July 1981 as a *'pioneer hotel in the modern style'*, defined by its *'red brick with stone dressings on steel frame'* and *'plan supposedly in the form of an aeroplane'*<sup>10</sup>. While the building retains *'largely original steel framed windows... [except those to the main façade which are 'openings in originally blank walls'] the interior has been altered'*.

Immediately to the north west of The Comet is a Grade II listed cast iron Milepost of circa 1820<sup>11</sup>, although there are few other proximate listed buildings or Scheduled Monuments. Further to the north is the Flight Test Hangar, Offices, Fire Station and Control Tower (British Aerospace)<sup>12</sup> designated Grade II\* listed status in September 1998; to the north east is the British Aerospace Gatehouse<sup>13</sup>, listed Grade II in 1993. A distance away to the south west is the Grade II\* designated early 20th century house, Torilla, by F.R.S. Yorke of 1934, an *'entirely concrete construction rendered later in roughcast'*<sup>14</sup>, with flat roof and parapet, metal framed windows and open plan arrangement.

Nationally, few public houses and hotels of the period are listed – and those that are retain relatively little of their original interior fittings and

10 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1101036, July 1981  
 11 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1100903, December 1986; recorded by the Historic Milepost Society, HE\_RGHT49  
 12 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1376561, 1998  
 13 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1251144, June 1993  
 14 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1348145, April 1993

decorative schemes. Although The Nag's Head at Bishops Stortford is one of the more complete examples, it has nevertheless undergone several phases of alteration as demonstrated by several photographs held by the RIBA dating to 1934, the year of its completion. The Royal York Hotel at Ryde on the Isle of Wight by J.B. Harrison and H.P. Gilkes<sup>15</sup> of 1937-1938 is another *'good example'* of a Modern Movement hotel which has also been *'rehabilitated'* to some extent, although it does retain *'some original wall-cupboards'*<sup>16</sup>.

The Grade II\* listed Midland Hotel, Morecambe, by Oliver Hill dating to 1932-1933 exemplifies the style: here, again, *'internal walls were demolished during the 1970s'*<sup>17</sup> and the frescoes repainted. The Ship Hotel built in 1935 in Skegness is now Grade II listed not only for its *'steel frame [with] concrete'*, but because the *'ornate iron rainwater heads and square down pipes survive as do most of the original awnings. [The] interior contains much of the original panelling and bar facilities'*<sup>18</sup>.

### Archaeology

An Historic Buildings Record of Geoffrey de Havilland's factory of 1934 (by Scottish architect Geoffrey Munro) was made by Heritage Network in 2007, commissioned *'to create a record of the building and consider the historical context of the site... as a result of an archaeological condition on the planning permission for the refurbishment and renovation of the former Canteen and Administration Blocks for the Hatfield Aerodrome, Comet Way.'* Not only are the buildings *'two fine examples of the International Modern style of architecture'* and *'noted landmarks on the Great North Road out of London'*, (and built of reinforced concrete in the 1930s), but *'have undergone only superficial changes since their construction'*<sup>19</sup>.

It was here that a series of historically significant planes were built including the Tiger Moth, and the Comet Racer. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the plant was involved in the assembling of the Hurricane, but a direct hit in 1940 reduced its capacity and *'further work was dispersed to other factories'*. All production ceased at the site in 1993.

Pre-Construct Archaeology carried out a Watching

15 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1033352, December 1998  
 16 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1033352, December 1998  
 17 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1208988, October 1976  
 18 - Historic England, List Entry Number: 1236694, March 1988  
 19 - Hillelson, David, 1500 Comet Way, Hatfield, Herts, Heritage Network, prepared on behalf on Hertfordshire Constabulary, Report No. 387, January 2007, summary; and p8

Brief at Comet Square bus depot in 2005, as well as the 'monitoring of groundworks for a piling platform [which] recorded modern made ground only' in 2006<sup>20</sup>. The Museum of London's Archaeology Service monitored development groundworks at the de Havilland Sports and Social Club, Hatfield Aerodrome, in 2001 – but again, 'no significant archaeological remains'<sup>21</sup> were found. A study 'carried out in advance of further development at the [Hatfield] Business Park'<sup>22</sup> (to the north of The Comet Hotel) discovered Neolithic and early mediaeval artefact scatter, and possible evidence of a mediaeval settlement. Historic England reports that an Iron Age settlement site was found in 1938-1939 at the De Havilland airfield.<sup>23</sup>

### History of the Comet

*'The English public-house needed to be reborn, and it has been. The many comely public-houses, well-designed, healthy and roomy, which have sprung up in England and Wales within the past generation, mark a considerable social revolution'<sup>24</sup>.*

That revolution, however, was not entirely successful – at least according to the architect of The Comet, who in 1959 in the Architect and Building News journal wrote that 'since the war... one is forced to the conclusion that there has been no outstanding development in pub design'<sup>25</sup>.

Musman's prescriptive ideal for the design of public houses was expressed in that same article via an assessment of contemporary requirements in form and function:

*'The architect, to make a successful job of designing a pub today, must combine traditional qualities, which have become part of the ordinary-man-in-the-street's idea of a pub, with the change which has taken place in the whole approach to drinking... He must fuse into his new design that atmosphere of cosiness which is the hub around which pub life revolves... He will have to consider... that there is a tendency for two bars to*

*be provided instead of three or four as formerly; that there is a school of thought which favours one common bar; that the standard of finish in the public bar is required to be almost as high as that in the saloon; that the dining room and restaurant have increased in popularity and that there is an ever-growing demand for the well-planned snack bar or buffet... Further, there is the elimination of the large barn-like type of bar and the provision, instead, of smaller rooms... Finally there is the growing importance attached to outdoor drinking, the use of the forecourt and the effect of flowers and the provision of terrace and garden. All these considerations have a profound effect on the type of plan which should be produced... Basically there is very little change in the fundamental pub plan... If these principles are carried out efficiently... there is no reason why the pub of today should not be just as dear to its public as the pub of yesterday, without having to continue to reproduce and copy past motifs and décor which are not representative of the age in which we live.'*



Musman's Comet pillar: a very modern pub sign, 1938

20 - Hawkins, N., Archaeological Watching Brief at Comet Square, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, Pre-Construct Archaeology, 2006

21 - Davis, S., De Havilland Sports and Social Club, Hatfield Aerodrome, Museum of London Archaeology Service, interim report, 2001

22 - Kenyon, D., Hatfield Business Park Stage 2: archaeological assessment, Cotswold Archaeological Trust

23 - Historic England, Monument Number: 364626

24 - Civilised Taverns, The Spectator Archive, 2nd October 1947, p24

25 - Musman, E.B. et al, Pubs Today in The Architect and Building News, October 14th 1959, p300





*The Comet: the roof is used to watch air displays - Taken from The Architect and Building News, January 1937, p94*

Indeed, in an article in the Architects' Journal written by Musman twenty years earlier in 1938 ('Public Houses: Design and Construction'<sup>26</sup>), he espouses the authenticity of modern architecture, but also the need to preserve historic types of pub, including the 'gin palace'.

In the same article he describes the design brief for The Comet, a 'road hotel to serve the dual purpose of a public house, with bars and a restaurant and lounge for luncheons and dinners; there are also facilities for music and dancing', the whole design 'in the form of an aeroplane... inspired by the clients' with to perpetuate the memory of the Comet machine flown by Scott and Black to Melbourne, and made at the De Havilland factory nearby.'<sup>27</sup>

OS maps of the 1920s reveal the gradual encroachment of modern development on former agricultural lands to the south west of Hatfield,

26 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, pp833-873

27 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p863



*OS Map of Hatfield, 1922: the vacant site to the west of the*

beyond 'New Town': these were substantial, suburban houses with sizeable gardens, and names suggestive of the villa ideal, built to accommodate a population growing in concurrence with the development of the de Havilland Factory.

The Comet Hotel, annotated as such on the 1937 OS map at the 'fork of the Barnet-By-Pass and the St Albans Road', was built at this main road junction in proximity to this expanding hinterland – and in what is the outline of a plane (the DH.88 Comet Racer), the manifestation of an ingenious scheme by this inventive architect, since lost or distorted through additional development. Indeed, the 'Comet... has had its interior much altered and modernised, whilst the exterior has been changed by having wings added to it by the current owners...'<sup>28</sup> This would have perplexed Musman: he had, after all, intended for 'each elevation [to be] designed as a complete architectural unit, undisfigured by pipes'.<sup>29</sup>

Originally, the exterior of the building had been designed with just as precision by Musman as the exceptional interior finishes, fashioned of rough-textured brown brick, incorporating Clipsham stone to the cills and heads of windows, copings to the parapet and the terrace wall, while metal window frames had been painted pale blue. All lettering was coloured in white enamel, and all external doors were fashioned of teak ('best in the long run in respect of durability'<sup>30</sup>).

28 CAMRA, Hertfordshire's Pints of View, February / March 2011, No. 245

29 The Architect and Building News, 15th January 1937, p96

30 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p837

Cleverly, the tower (now gone) and any exterior glass was internally lit with green light at night, while the 'flat roofs leading from the private sitting-room on the first floor to the tower [were] finished in tile'<sup>31</sup>. Musman's own unique, perhaps eccentric style was unleashed in the individuality of these buildings: 'the combination of both public and domestic uses gives splendid opportunities for varied and individual treatment... [the architect] will have a great opportunity of... confining himself to simplicity, good proportions and well-chosen ornament, carefully designed lamps, name plates and other details'<sup>32</sup> while never inappropriately mismatching a new building to old surroundings.

The car park was suitably informal: 'with the tremendous growth of motor traffic it is becoming absolutely necessary to set aside as much space as possible... arrange your parking all around the house'.

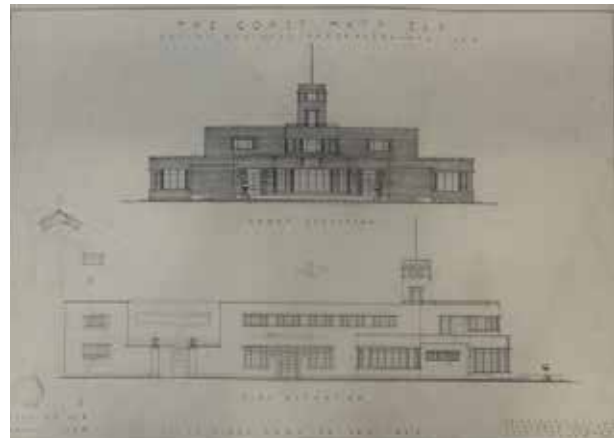
Musman was indeed responsible for overseeing the design in its entirety – including 'all internal decorations, furniture, fittings, carpets, curtains etc'<sup>33</sup> as well as cellar design, temperature, installation of pipes and heating.

The accompanying floor plans (and those available at the RIBA Study Room at the V&A Museum) reveal a precise grading of rooms, ingeniously laid out within the steel-framed structure in its aeroplane shape: at the front of the building was the saloon lounge with bow window to the main façade looking out over the terrace; moving further inwards was the saloon bar with restaurant to the other side of the kitchen, centrally located, and finally the public bar to the rear, with guest room opposite. The structurally (and socially) separate 'tail' of the plane (except at first floor level) was occupied by staff accommodation, lock ups and chauffeur room ('tenants and staff quarters... should have a separate entrance from the outside distinct from the entrances to the bars or other public rooms'<sup>34</sup>). To the first floor were the guest bedrooms, accessed via a lift; each had central heating.

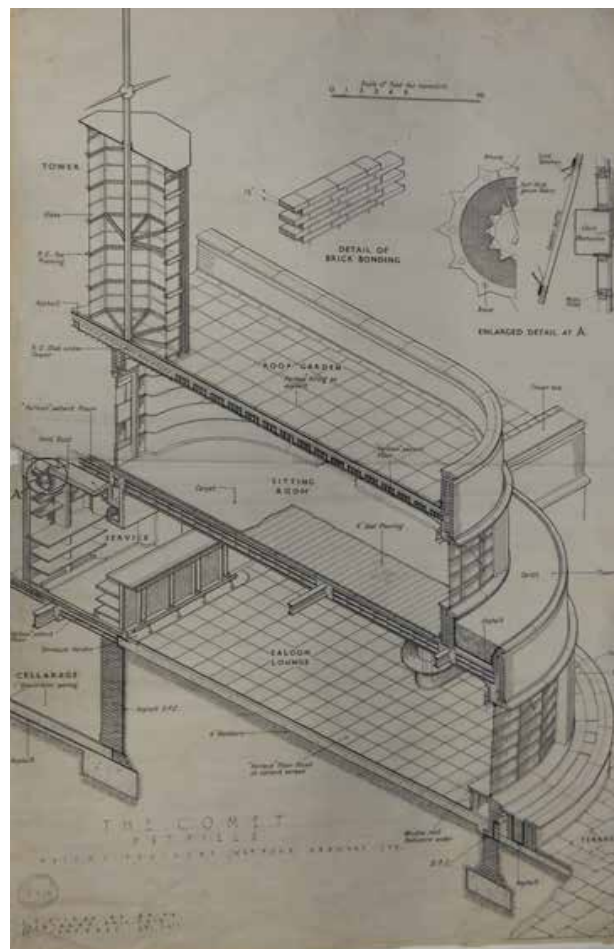
Thus, although the plan of the building was symmetrical, and its façades starkly geometrical,

inside there was some variation of the plan according to practicality and societal hierarchy.

Musman's gripe that there was no such thing as a treatise on pub design had led to his producing his detailed piece in the Architects Journal in the same year as The Comet was finished: in this he described the hierarchy of the rooms (the bars are the most important, followed by the saloon lounge, which must have a separate entrance from the



The Comet: main elevation, March 1936 - RIBA Drawings Collection, PA 354/4



The Comet: cross section, circa 1936 - RIBA Drawings Collection, PA 354/4

31 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p863

32 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p836

33 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p863

34 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p863

street, and the proportions of the room must be generous) as well as the importance of supervision and service (*'it is essential that all parts of a bar should be visible... there should be no alcoves or portions screened off in which customers can carry on betting or other practices prohibited on the premises'*). Service, and the landlord's office should, however, form the hub of the plan: the *'most essential point is to reduce labour to a minimum and allow plenty of room to deal with a large number of customers efficiently and quickly.'* He was ever interested in his clients and how they ran their business, for this would determine his schemes: efficacy and adeptness were highly important. A new public house or hotel on a corner site should be *'placed so as to advertise itself and should be made to appear as large as possible to the general public'*<sup>35</sup> and its signage be clear and visible. This was achieved with certainty at The Comet.

Interior photographs of the period portray a remarkable design feat in exemplary 1930s style combining geometric form with stylised, yet more fluid detailing, especially to the ironwork of the balustrade of the stairs: a comet leaving a trail of swirls amidst a night sky of moon and star. The carpets were geometrically patterned, the mirrors Art Deco, and the aircraft theme continued in the stylised 1930s propeller installed above the dining room. Musman had evidently attempted to create a luxurious interior style similar to that of the Queen Mary liner at The Nag's Head; and which is apparent here at The Comet too. Much of this is lost, but it represented Musman's ability – and this was his reputation – as an authority on roadside hotels and public houses, and their design aesthetically, socially and architecturally. The internal plan was just as important as the outward expression of function.

Indeed, Musman's principles about the interior were based, again, on *'simplicity and good proportion, durability and refinement, suitability and maintenance'*<sup>36</sup>. In the Saloon Lounge of The Comet *'the plastered walls are finished with a cream, stippled plastic paint [in Beauvais cream colour], the floor is of rubber in buff squares with brown lines, joinery and chairs are of figured teak, the upholstery being dull yellow leather.'*<sup>37</sup> In the

35 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p836

36 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p837; the article gives a good room-by-room description of the interior finishes and design of The Comet only a few years after its completion

37 - Hill, Jane, The Sculpture of Gertrude Hermes, 2011, p50



*Interior of The Comet - Taken from the Architect and Building News, January 1937, p97*

Saloon Bar, *'the walls were covered in veneered teak; in the Public Bar were fixed teak seats. The same decorative finish was broadly applied throughout, but with features of particular curiosity: Gertrude Hermes had contributed to the design with three teak shelving piers carved in low relief for the bar... lit from a concealed source and secured by a bronze rolling shutter. One shelving pier depicted a tipsy man hugging a lamppost while a long-tailed comet moved in elliptical path about the sun.'*<sup>38</sup> Cosmo Clark, artist and painter, also employed at The Nag's Head, was commissioned here, too, by Musman.

Significantly, Musman's design for The Comet was entirely innovative as *'one of the first inns to be built in the style of the 20th century without borrowings from the past'*<sup>39</sup>, distinguished by the archetypal horizontal emphasis (even the bricks are flatter than usual), and bold symmetry.

Pevsner was resolute in his beliefs about modern architecture remarking that *'the many new inns of the motor roadside or the new housing estate [are] decent, clean places looking for all the world like Post Offices or imitation Tudor manor houses or the alms houses of a progressive City company... I believe the so-called modern style to be the only genuine architectural expression of this century of ours. I hate building in the Georgian character or in the Tudor character...'*<sup>40</sup>

Thus, his espousal of The Comet's design was sincere, especially when Basil Oliver, the conservative architect, and author of a

38 - Hill, Jane, The Sculpture of Gertrude Hermes, 2011, p50

39 - Pevsner, Nikolaus & Cherry, Bridget, The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire, 1977, p172

40 - Games, Stephen, Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks: Architecture and Art on Radio and Television, 1945-1977, 2014, p54; quoting from The Renaissance of the English Public House, BBC Home Service, 'The Critics', November 2nd 1947



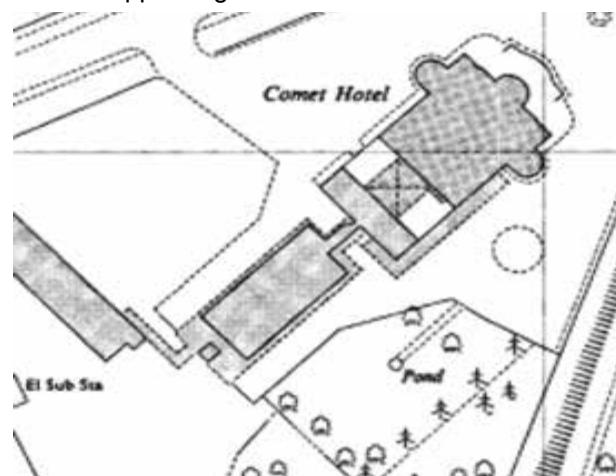


*The first floor Sitting Room of The Comet with silver gilt panelling - taken from The Architect and Building News, January 1937, p97*

book on the development of the English pub, claimed Musman's hotel building as one of his chosen works representing the best of the anti-traditionalists<sup>41</sup>. The Comet was also considered the '*most streamlined example of the peculiar British brick version of modernism*<sup>42</sup>, '*strikingly modern*<sup>43</sup>, exemplifying the '*moderne style, best seen in the work of E.B. Musman*<sup>44</sup>, and '*easily the best designed pub in Britain*<sup>45</sup>. Furthermore, it incorporated sculptural work by the highly regarded Eric Kennington: a single pillar in Portland stone, '*an indebtedness to the mediaeval pillars of Kilpeck Church, Herefordshire*<sup>46</sup> but '*representing eighteen peculiar methods of flight*<sup>47</sup>.

The visual impact of the Comet is no less architecturally accomplished than The Nag's Head, and displays the same apsidal ends used

to emphasise the geometry, but its symbolic and social relationship with its environment (the New Town and the de Havilland works) is of considerable importance. Some of Musman's intentional design features have been altered: it has lost its roof lantern – redolent of a control tower – and despite the addition of French doors to the façade replacing the heavy wooden 1930s versions, and new fenestration, the essential architectural form survives, despite the inappropriate clutter and inconsistency of the modern appendages.



*OS Map, 1973: asymmetrical additions made to the rear of the building*

41 - He did not, however, consider it a threat to mainstream public house architecture

42 - McKean, Charles, Architectural Guide to Cambridge and East Anglia since 1920, 1982, p161

43 - Thirties Society Journal, nos 1-5, 1980, p4

44 - Elwall, Robert, Bricks and Beer: English Pub Architecture, 1830-1939, 1983, p42

45 - Charlton, Susannah, Harwood, Elain & Powers, Alan, British Modern: Architecture and Design in the 1930s, 2007, p35

46 - Hill, Jane, The Sculpture of Gertrude Hermes, 2011, p50; the columns in the nave are Norman

47 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p861

*'This is a model building of its kind, exemplary of good design in its fuller significance and notable for the thought behind the merest details'*<sup>48</sup> wrote the Architect and Building News reporter in 1937, admiring of its silver gilt panelling in the restaurant, its Chinese red and gold furniture, its zebra-patterned carpet, its curtains of gold satin with silver stars and the painted parchment light fittings. This endured until the mid-20th century. Between 1961 and 1972 the Comet Hotel was expanded to the south west, its distinctive shape changed by the addition of a thin, linear structure on to its 'tail' end, albeit adjoined by a narrow construction, with a further rectangular building at a right angle, connected by what could be a footpath or corridor. Thus, the homogeneity of Musman's scheme was lost.

### Other works; Roadside Hotels and Pubs; Health Centers and Houses

Musman was not exclusively a modern architect, but capable of vernacular adaptation. In 1936, the same year during which The Comet was completed, he renovated and altered the Kings Arms in Amersham – a 16th century, Grade II\* listed timber framed edifice – by adding a dormer and eastern gable, as well as new heating chamber and stack.

Pevsner described The King's Arms as *'glamorized... there is much fakery...'*<sup>49</sup>, but notes accompanying photographs, and some of Musman's original pen and ink sketches suggest that all this was necessary to improve the facilities: *the 'restoration of No. 47... was the first part of the contract. This building was converted into a Restaurant, with Tea Lounge, Kitchens etc. on the Ground floor, and into a large Banqueting Hall; Guest Bedrooms etc. on part of the 1st floor. Care was taken to preserve the original timbers, and to remove all work as far as possible not in character with the XV and XVI centuries, and to carry out all renovations and additional work in the same manner... The restoration of the King's Arms Inn adjoining formed the second contract... In this case the whole front has been remodelled and brought into conformity with No. 47...'*<sup>50</sup>

Musman's scheme at the Nag's Head exhibits the style, albeit less ebulliently, with its austere flat roofs, visual 'layering' of the structural elements

48 - The Architect and Building News, 15th January 1937, p96  
 49 - Pevsner, Nikolaus, Williamson, Elizabeth & Brandwood, Geoffrey K., The Buildings of England – Buckinghamshire, 1994, p136  
 50 - RIBA Drawings Collection, PA 354/1 (1-5); accompanying typed notes

to the façade, corner turrets and apsidal ends. It also demonstrates the architect's talent for incorporating local motif, thus 'tying' the building to its environment: in this instance he commissioned the sculptor Eric Henri Kennington to carve a relief panel depicting the Anglo-Saxon origins of the town of Hatfield.



*Sketch of No. 47 showing suggested alterations made before commencement of work. 'The guiding principle in remodelling The King's Arms, has been to join it to No. 47 in such a way as to give the impression of one complete building RIBA Drawings Collection, PA 354/1 (1-5)/1*



*Sketch of the rear courtyard at the King's Arms, Amersham, by Ernest Musman - RIBA Drawings Collection, PA 354/1 (1-5)/4*



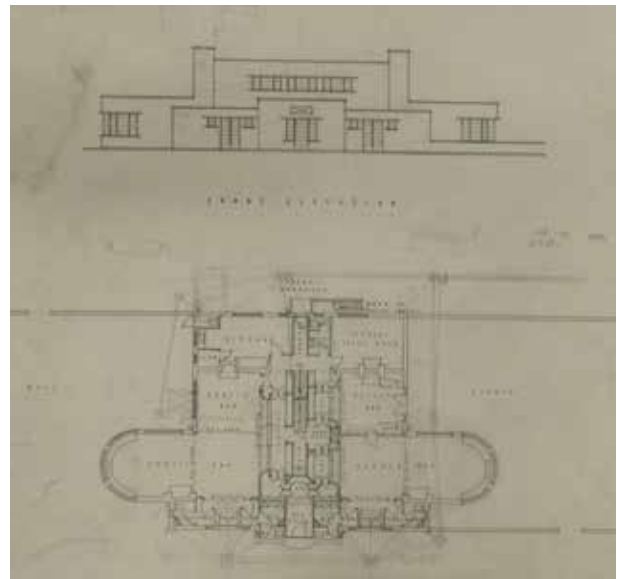
Side elevation of The Nag's Head at Bishop Stortford by Ernest Brander Musman - RIBA Drawings Collection PA 354/2/4

An examination of the original plans drawn by the architect reveal similarities with The Comet: hard symmetry in consensus with the Deco, and interiors which accorded with the horizontal emphasis of the style. Musman had annotated his initial sketches of the 'elevation to public bar' and 'saloon bar' with notes such as 'glass details later' (referring to a mirror in the former), and similarly 'tile details later' (fireplace in the same), but the general scheme was complete and exhibited his remarkable aptitude for architectural and decorative proportion in modern design.

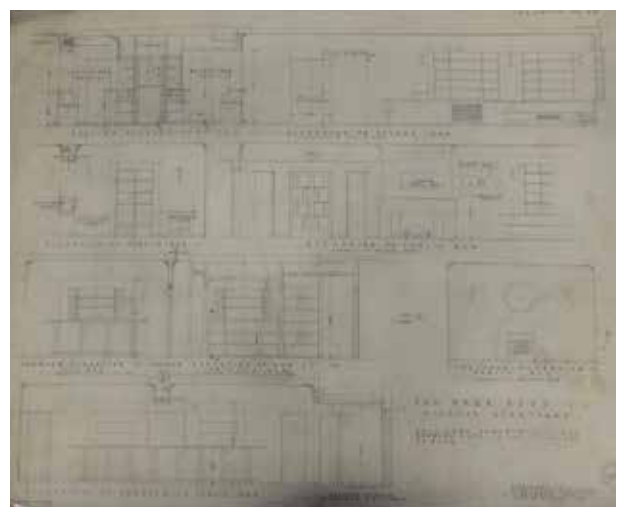
Perhaps this work might be considered his most individual: he was given 'complete control over the design and allowed to choose his team of artists... [including] Cosmo Clark for the paintings inside'<sup>51</sup> which depicted the history of brewing.

Musman's repertoire is often described as exclusively modern; yet among his drawings are several buildings which suggest that he was accomplished not only at the restoration and adaptation of historic structures, but retranslated earlier styles for his own schemes, including a pair of semi-detached houses at Frognal, Hampstead; as well as The Myllett Arms on Western Avenue, Perivale – again for the Benskins Brewery (Watford) Ltd.

This edifice, characterised by neo-Georgian arched windows and a sense of 'bulk' was described as 'more sober' in contrast to the 'jazzy colourful façade of the Hoover building' and by E.B.



The Nags Head, Bishop Stortford -RIBA Drawings Collection PA 354/2/2



The Nag's Head: interior design by Musman, March 1934 - RIBA Drawings Collection PA 354/2/8

51 - Musman, E.B., Public Houses: Design and Construction, Architects' Journal, November 24th 1938, p872



Musman, 'doyen of roadside architects'<sup>52</sup>.

His more traditional schemes included a proposed house, 'Falaise' Hillside on the East Dean Downlands Estate near Eastbourne of February 1945: a surviving drawing suggests a Lutyensesque interpretation of the domestic vernacular with its asymmetrical plan and elevations, tiled gables (including a dovecote projecting from one), tall stacks and arched doorways.

The Mill Public House – again for Benskins Brewery – was designed by Musman in partnership with Cousens in 1956 and demonstrates his talent for using appropriate references to the function of the building: '*this public-house has a number of features which are novel and interesting... Here the 'external sign is a skeleton of a [wind] mill – is steel rod painted white mounted on a white post [and]... an enlarged reproduction in the saloon bar of a freehand sketch by the architect of a Norfolk mill is acid etched on the glass on the central window facing the garden*'<sup>53</sup>.

And, again, The Mill exhibits his predilection for symmetry on both plan and to the treatment of the elevation with the former consisting of 'two bars, public and saloon on each side of a small off-licence'.

Typically, he had taken into consideration the need for colour: outside were flowers, bright furniture and umbrellas, gardens and a terrace – as well as unique interior decoration, this time by Gordon Cullen who designed '*an original and clever mural*'<sup>54</sup>, and lit flower boxes and vases. The plan of The Mill was clever, a skilful elliptical curve, replicated in the style if the fireplaces inside. Musman had, again, built a loggia to the rear of the building: the quality of his schemes was unwavering.

That quality could be seen, yet again, at Musman and Cousens' White Knight at Crawley, constructed on an L-shaped plan on a site located in between old woodlands, and a new shopping centre.

Here was a '*paved terrace of generous proportions*

52 - Stamp, Gavin, *Anti-Ugly: Excursions in English Architecture and Design*, 2013, p32; article August 2005, author's italics; the author discusses the 'consistent degradation of the environment [of Western Avenue] sanctioned by the authorities. This degradation is visual, but also material... The destruction of existing masonry structures is irresponsible and wrong in principle.'

53 - *The Architect and Building News*, 1st November 1956, p584

54 - *The Architect and Buildings News*, 1st November 1956, p585

*bordered on two sides by a pergola of white-painted timber... brightened by a display of flowers*' and two bars, known as the Knight's Saloon and the Knight's Taproom.

The architects' whimsical, brilliant references to knights (a chessboard motif at the main entrance) – and the superiority of the fittings, including the same teak and upholstered seating (and space for dart boards, as was included at all his public-house schemes), along with the precise understanding of the demographic and social changes in customer requirements (a coffee room: no alcohol was served here) meant that The White Knight exemplified his remarkable aptitude for such schemes.



*The Mill at Mill Hill by Ernest Brander Musman: the building is subtly curved*



*Pub sign, The Mill at Mill Hill*

Although he was here working with his colleague, Cousins, it is of note that *'the materials used in the construction of The White Knight are, in the main, traditional, although their application to the building often forms a departure from the usual standards of pub design. The walls are of load-bearing brickwork, Surrey grey sandfaced bricks being used for facing work.'*<sup>55</sup>

His most successful work seems to have been his pursuit of pubs and hotels and other public buildings, expressed in modern architecture, and usually exemplified by Musman's clever, whimsical allusions to their setting.

In circa 1930 Musman submitted designs for the Pioneer Health Centre at Peckham as part of the Peckham Experiment which was established in 1926 (and which ran through to the 1950s) to improve the health of the local working class through social enhancement, but was unfortunately on this occasion bettered by (Sir) Owen Williams, engineer. Very few could ever claim to have bettered Musman's record, however, for producing some of the most unusual, incomparable, eccentric architecture for the Modern Movement, and which in every instance referred thoughtfully, carefully and with considerable aesthetic perception, to the client, environment and authenticity of design.

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55 - Musman, E.B. et al, Pubs Today in The Architect and Building News, October 14th 1959, p307



*The Pioneer Health Centre: architect's perspective by Musman - RIBA Drawings Collection, PA 354/9/20*



*Musman's designs for the new Metropole Hotel at Margate - RIBA Drawings Collection PA 353/3/4*

## 5. Heritage Assets

A heritage asset is defined in the glossary of the NPPF as “a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).”

The significance and settings of the heritage assets within the proposed site and their relationship to the site requires assessment in order to provide a context for, and to determine the impact of, current development proposals. ‘Significance’ for built assets can be assessed using the criteria set out in the national Statutory Listing guidance. These selection criteria take into account:

- Historic significance – *the age and history of the asset, its development over time, the strength of its tie to a particular architectural period, the layout of a site, the plan form of a building, internal features of special character including chimneystacks and fireplaces.*
- Cultural significance – *the role a site plays in a historic setting, village, town or landscape context, the use of a building perhaps tied to a local industry or agriculture, social connections of an original architect or owner.*
- Aesthetic/Architectural significance – *the visual qualities and characteristics of the asset (settlement site or building), long views, legibility of building form, character of elevations, roofscape, materials and fabric, special features of interest, setting (including public and private views).*
- Evidential significance – *evolution of the asset, phases of development over different periods, important features, evidence in building fabric, potential for below ground remains to be able to address these aspects, and depending on the nature of the heritage asset.*

These criteria tend to be those which lead to an asset being designated for its national importance. ‘Value’ on the other hand, is focused at a more local level and can be assessed using the guidance in Historic England’s [Conservation Principles](#) (2008).

In assessing the significance of an historic building or site it is important to realise that heritage assets may be affected either by direct physical change or by changes in their setting, or both. These changes may be harmful or beneficial.

### Definition of Setting

The NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as “the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.”

The contribution of setting to the special interest of a heritage asset is often expressed via views of the asset itself or views of its surroundings, either from or through the asset. Historic England highlights in its ‘*Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The setting of Heritage Assets*’ which types of views contribute more to the understanding of the significance of a heritage asset, and are listed below:

- “those where relationships between the asset and other historic assets or places or natural features are particularly relevant;
- those with historical associations, including viewing points;
- those where the composition within the view was a fundamental aspect of the design of the heritage asset; and
- those between heritage assets and natural or topographic features, or phenomena such as solar and lunar events.” (Note 3: *The setting of Heritage Assets*)

Our assessment will consider the extent to which the proposed residential development will result in a change within the setting of the identified assets and whether this change would be harmful to the assets identified, or would preserve their setting.

Although there are a number of assets within the local surrounding area, the location and significance of many of them results in them having no perceptible individual relationship with the proposed site. For this reason, only the heritage assets which may be considered to be affected by the proposed development have been identified.



*Side elevation of the Comet Hotel*

### **The Comet Hotel - Grade II listed building**

Roadside inns and improved public houses began to appear in Britain during the inter-war years. Most were constructed in high quality materials and had leading architects commissioned to design and manage the builds. Several commissions were undertaken for Benskins Watford Brewery by Ernest Brander Musman, a Fellow of the Royal British Architects, including The Comet in 1933, located in Hatfield.

The Comet is constructed in red brick with stone dressings on a steel frame and is thought to be designed along the outline of an aeroplane. The building is two storeys in height with a projecting rounded centrepiece with rounded single storey wings on either side. The original design incorporated a viewing lantern above the central projecting element, which added a strong vertical element to the building and is believed to represent a control tower.

The building was added to the Statutory List in July 1981, although it was noted at the time that the interior of the building had been altered.

### **Ground Floor**

The ground floor originally consisted of a restaurant, saloon lounge, saloon bar and public bar with the kitchen and other service areas located in the centre and rear of the building.

The public bar and the saloon bar were located on the north-west side of the building and originally had back to back fireplace which created a central feature within each room.

The public bar had a separate entrance which, when viewed on plan, was directly opposite and in line with the hotel entrance on the south east side of the building. Both rooms had tiling to the floor although the walls in the public bar was finished in a mixture of tiles and plaster whilst the saloon bar was finished in a mixture of panelling and plaster. Both rooms had bar areas for customers and were relatively simple in decoration with modest lighting.

Of particular note is a curved detail to the top of the walls in the saloon bar which merges into the ceiling, this detail creates an attractive alternative to a traditional cornice and is seen in a number of rooms throughout the building.

The Saloon bar led into the Saloon lounge, via a vestibule link; this was again simple decorated and finished in plaster with the curved wall detail as





*Historic exterior, RIBA Library Photographs Collection 5969*



*First floor sitting room, RIBA Library Photographs Collection*

seen in the saloon bar. The room contained two large columns marking the front curved projection of the building and another bar area.

This room then led through, via another vestibule link, to the restaurant area. This room was more richly decorated with panelling to the entire wall and an angled cornice type feature. This room then led through to the original hotel entrance where the principal stair is located.

At the rear of the building was a service yard with a block for garaging and staff/chauffeur accommodation above. The entrance into the building from the service yard is in line with the central point of the front projecting element and is still in situ.

### **First Floor**

At first floor level the original building had 11 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, 2 WCs and a large sitting room to the north east of the building (pictured below). This room had a glass viewing lantern above it with a circular stair up to a viewing lantern

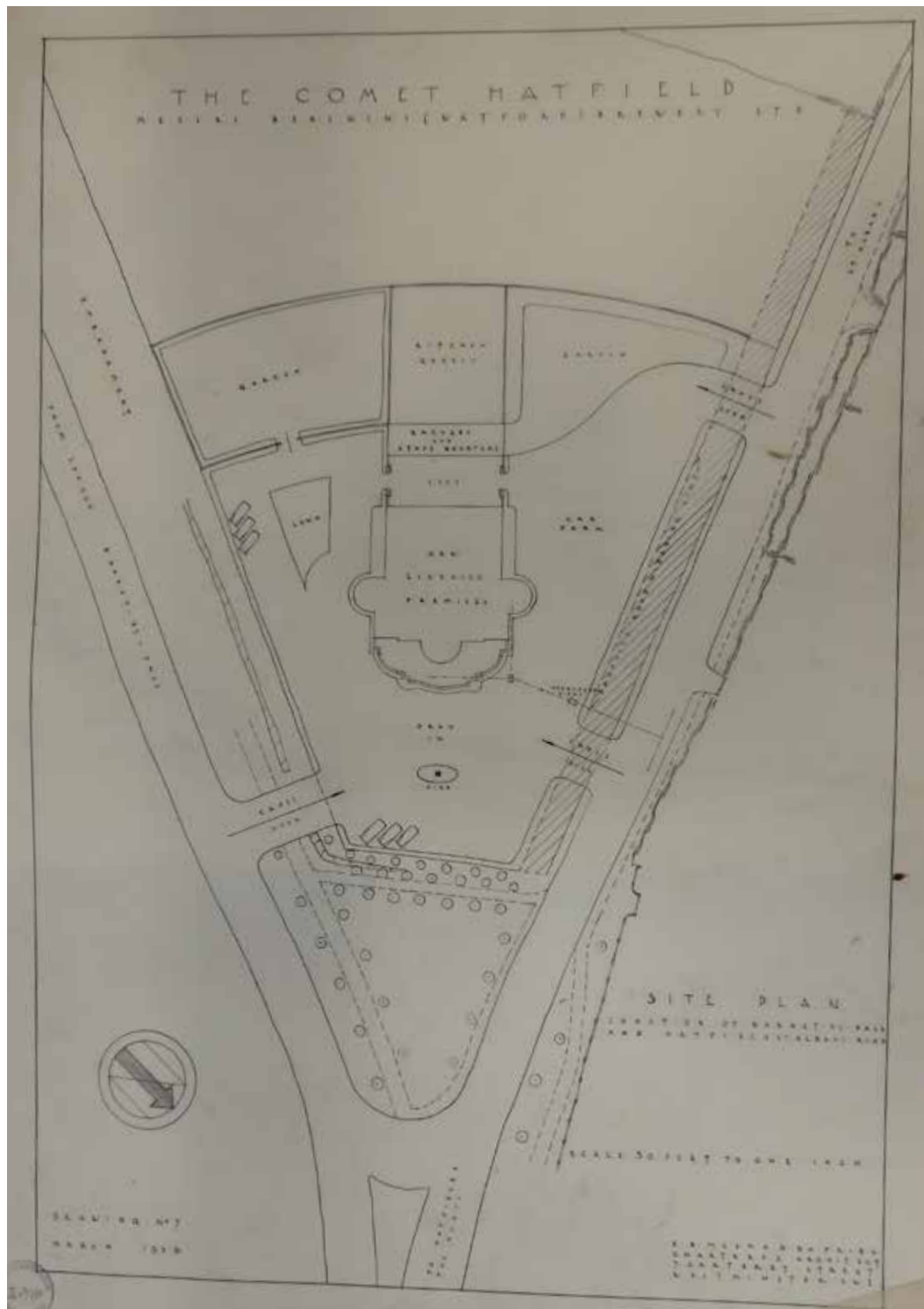


*Saloon Lounge, RIBA Library Photographs Collection 17194*



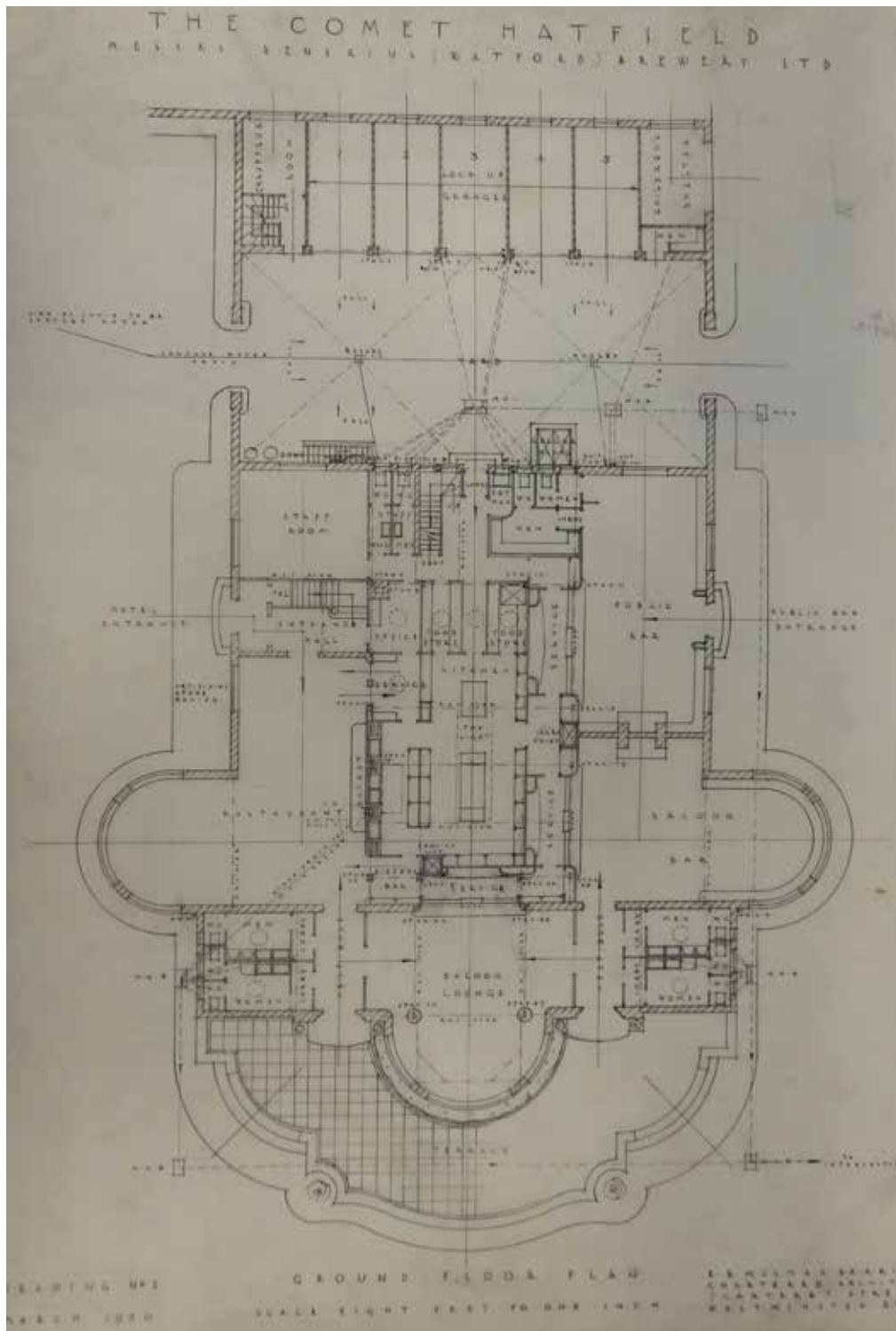
*Public Bar, RIBA Library Photographs Collection 24732*

Original architect's plans (1936)

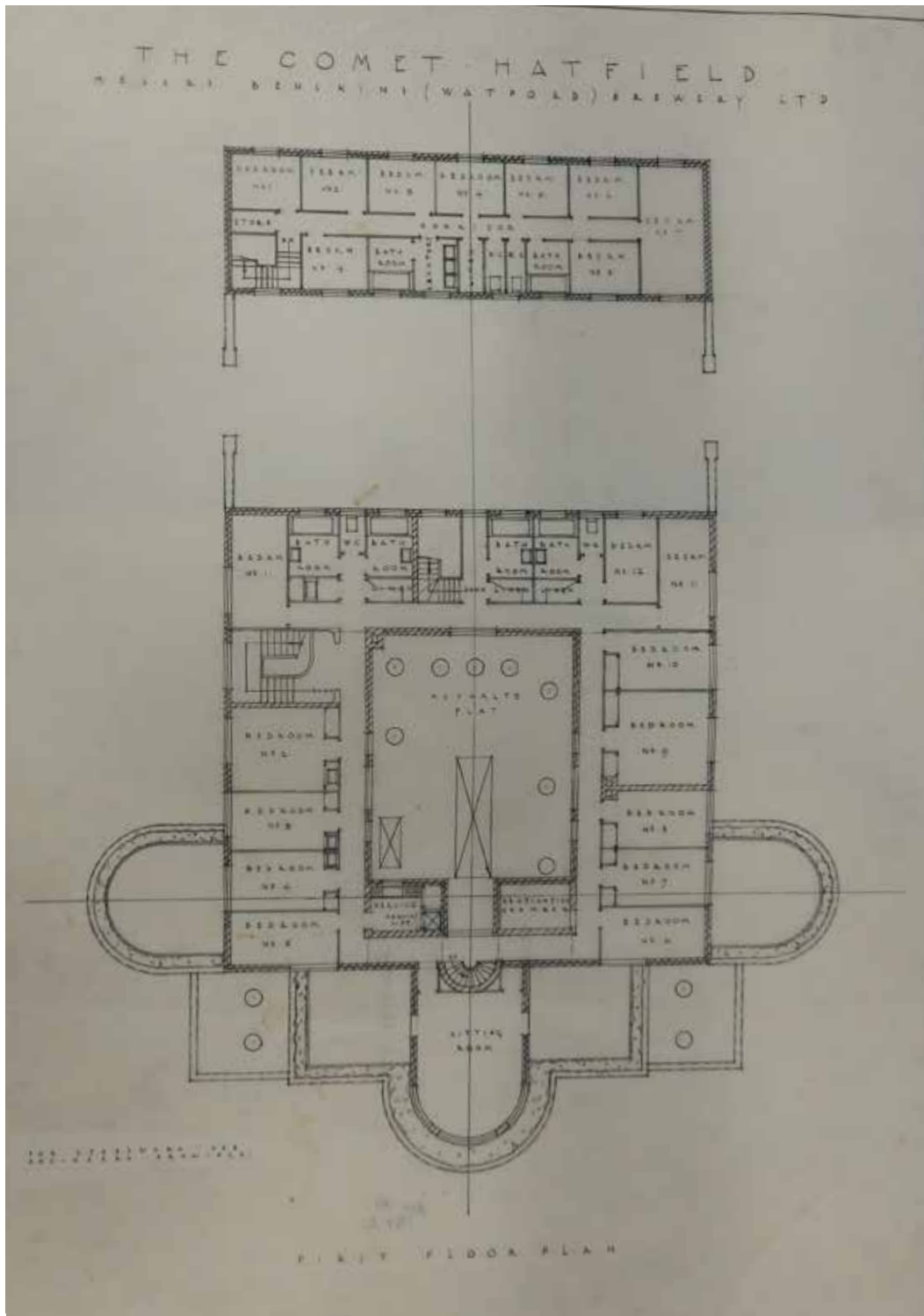


Proposed site layout, 1936. Note the area already reserved for road-widening along St Albans Road. Also note the original extent of car parking around the building.

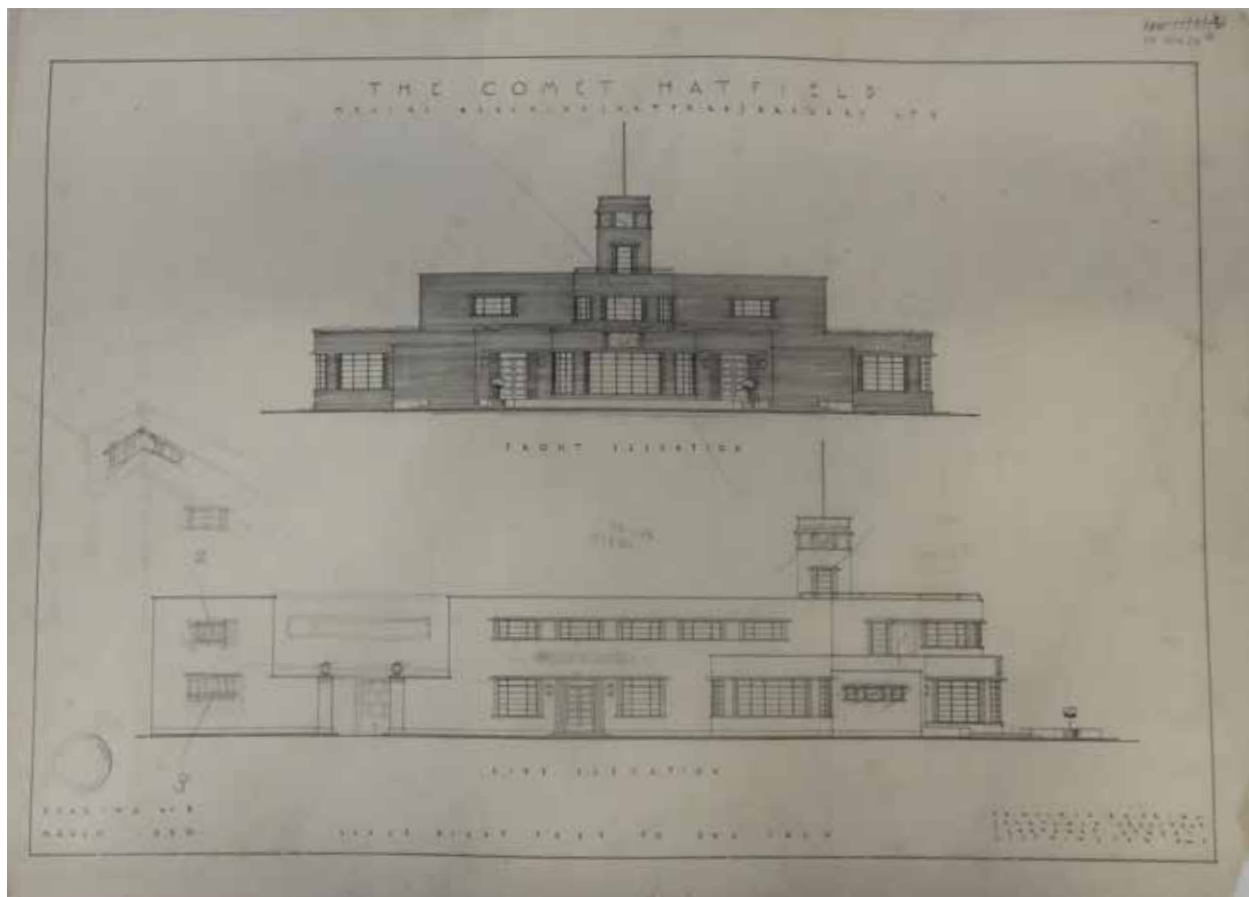




Proposed ground floor plan, 1936. Points to note include: the original open service yard at the rear and the lack of the overbridge extension. Also, the kitchen was in the centre of the plan, as now. The rear block was used for chauffeurs and garaging. The plan has altered little in the main hotel area, although the WC areas (left and right) have now been relocated to be a little less prominent. Note the original external terrace area at the front.



*Proposed first floor plan, 1936. Points to note include: the cellular layout of rooms on the first floor remains partly intact. These rooms were generally quite small in size, served by the corridor running around the central lightwell. The lightwell shows a number of sun-holes illuminating kitchen and storage rooms below. This plan shows a small staircase access to the original lantern design (not as built). The rear range is not connection yet by the over-bridge extension but shows very small rooms used for overnight accommodation by chauffeurs and staff.*

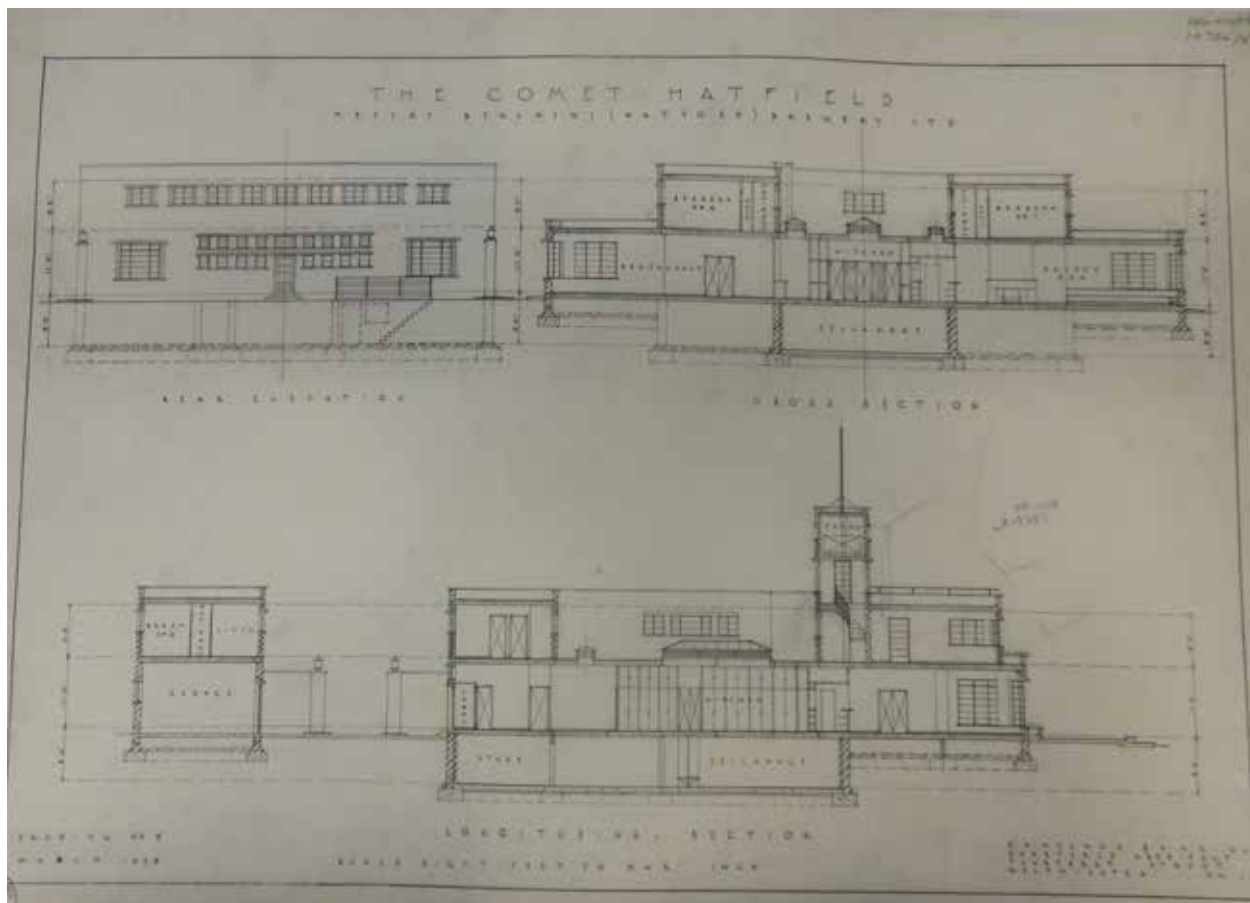


*Proposed front and side elevation, dated March 1936. Points to note include: front elevation largely as built except for the revision to the lantern, which was adapted to the simpler, lighter glazed lantern shown below. The blank areas of wall to each side of the main bar screened the WCs behind (now removed).*

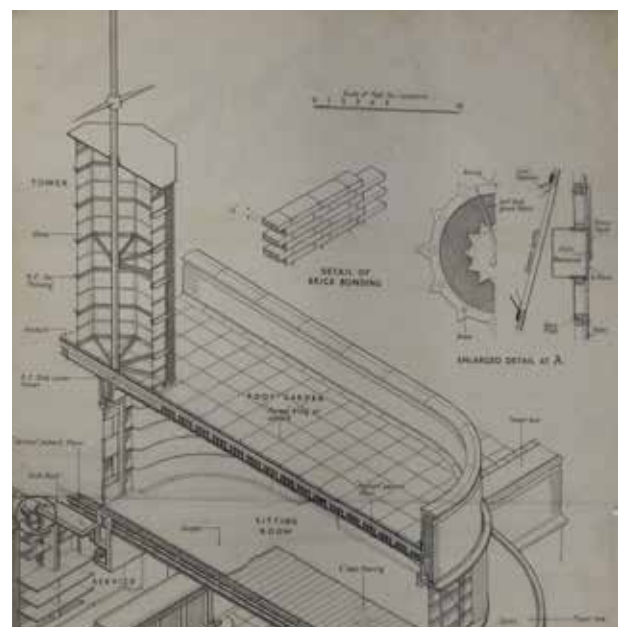
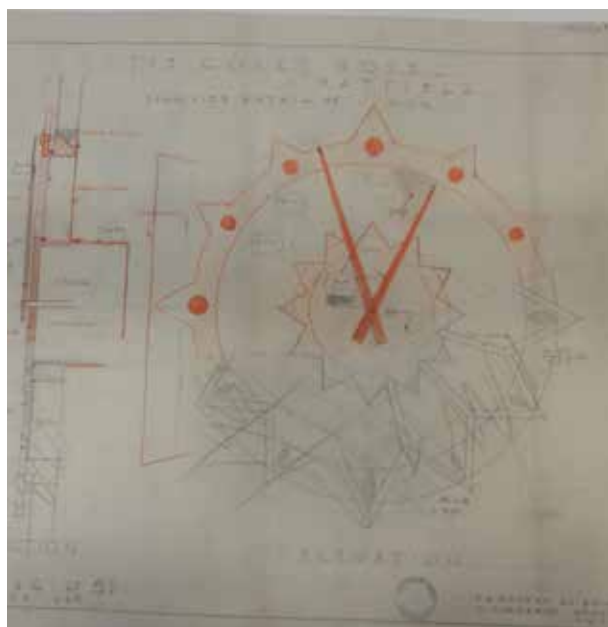
*The side elevation shows the original articulation prior to the addition of the side extension and the foyer infill. Of particular note is the detailing of the screen walls and piers and the later sketch addition of the overbridge extension, which appears to have been added very soon after construction of the original building.*



*Front elevation and glazed lantern, as built. Dated November 1936.*



Proposed front and side elevation, dated March 1936. The original section is interesting, particularly in showing the original rear elevation of the front block (which is now partly concealed by the overbridge extension). The section also shows the treatment of the kitchen and its top-lighting, and the original intention for the lantern/tower.



Original, Musman designs for a clock to feature within the bar area. The axonometric shows how the clock forms part of the bar design, sitting below the glazed lantern (as built)



### Mile Post - Grade II listed building

The cast iron milepost indicating 1 mile to Hatfield, is located on the north side of St Albans Road West.

It appears that it has been relocated to this position as a result of the road-widening schemes and the formation of the roundabout.

The current setting of the milepost is dominated by the large scale highway engineering; however, it's location within a verge of reasonable width provides some softening.

Due to the distance involved and the roads between, there is no evident relationship of setting between the Comet Hotel and the milepost.



*Milepost, St Albans Road West - Grade II*



*Location and setting of the milepost, which is dominated by the highway infrastructure.*

## 6. Significance Assessment

### The Comet Hotel

#### Interior

The building has been altered from its original condition, both in terms of its plan-form and interior finishes and detailing. It appears that the majority of this work occurred prior to the listing of the building (and the Statutory List Description notes the extent of internal alteration).

The alteration works undertaken involved the stripping of the almost all the interior spaces of their original finishes and detailing. For example, all the coving and ceiling detailing has been removed, all bar finishes, joinery and floor finishes. It is thought that at least some of this work may have been in response to the use of asbestos in the original construction.

At ground floor level, a dropped (or suspended) ceiling has been installed throughout the building with a large faux cornice applied below. Above this lowered ceiling, all evidence of former finishes and corning have been removed to bare finishes. It is some compensation that the replacement modern finishes, including the large cornices, skirting and door frames, make mild reference to the Art Deco era of design, even if they are no substitute for the original detailing.

In terms of remaining quality, the logic of the overall plan-form remains, and the subdivision between the usage of the four principal ground floor spaces (Public Bar, Saloon Bar, Saloon Lounge and Restaurant) can be understood, even if they are all but stripped of their original finishes and features.

The original principal and secondary staircases remain in situ. The principal stair is a good example of the sinuous, elegant design of the period albeit that the integral phone booth beneath it has been removed. The secondary, service stair has some simple, elegant touches in the newel post.

In terms of assessing the significance of the building at ground floor, it is our view that there are no rooms or spaces that attain a 'high' level of quality due to the extent of alteration and loss. In our assessment, the former, principal bar spaces, and the stairs, attain a **medium** level of significance resulting from their extant plan-form and the character deriving from their spatial quality and the Crittall windows illuminating the spaces. The service areas (including kitchen, WCs and rear range) possess a low significance due to the extent of adaptation.

The modern extensions to the original plan-form (including the foyer infill) do not benefit the legibility of the original building or its architectural quality and are of **no significance**. Their removal would be beneficial. At first floor level, the sense of the original corridor plan remains, as do a number of the original bedroom spaces (albeit fitted out to modern standards). Two of the very small original bedroom spaces are in use as offices/storage and retain their plaster finishes and coving, as well as the simple skirtings and architraves of the original build. The quality of this is, however, limited.

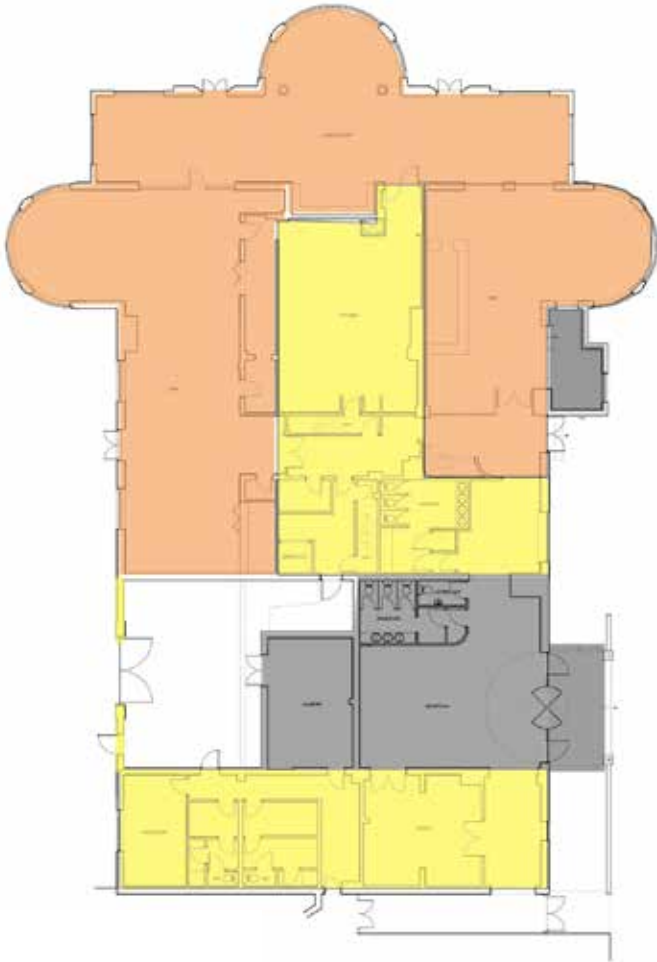
A number of the original bedroom spaces have been combined to form larger conference rooms.

The upper landing and the front-facing 'viewing gallery' are the rooms which retain the highest level of significance at this level. We consider that these spaces retain a **medium** level of significance, with the others at a **low** level.

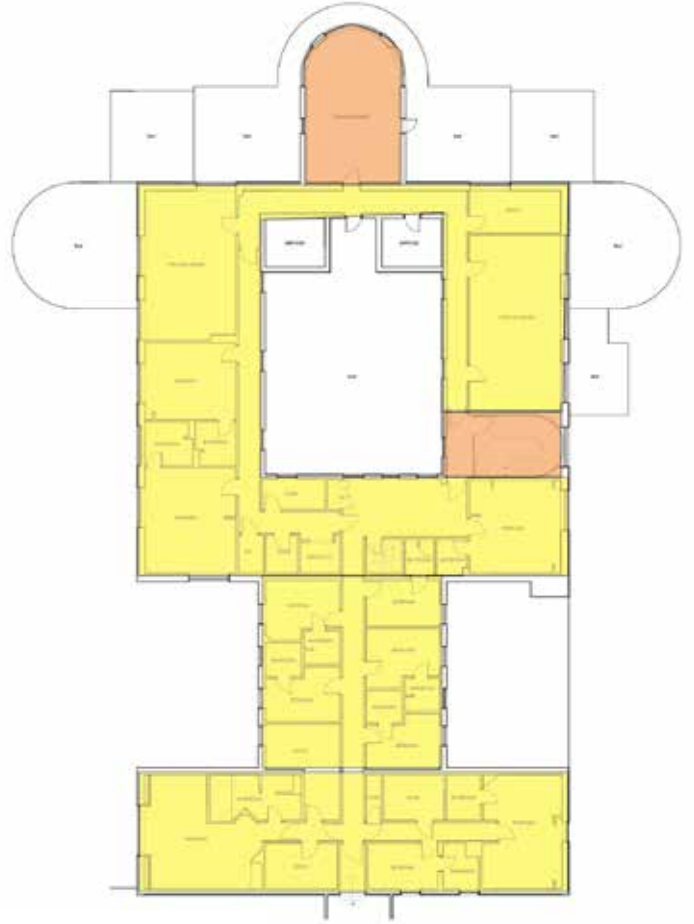
The original glazed lantern As a result, the intended plan form and use of this floor level has been compromised to some degree.

#### Summary

In terms of extant significance, we consider that the building interior holds **medium/low** levels of significance. This is the result of a relatively modest quality of detailing originally and the considerable extent of adaptation and alteration.



Existing ground floor plan: significance assessment



Existing first floor plan: significance assessment

**Significance level:**

- High
- Medium
- Low
- None



*First floor meeting room*



*Access to basement*



*Original entrance from rear yard to building still in situ although a number of services encroach upon detail.*



*Opening in roof for original lantern still visible.*





*Original stair is still in situ, although the original phone box, located underneath has, at some date, been removed.*



*Modern bar fittings*



*Original Crittall window.*



*Example of lowered ceiling, installed during a previous refit (prior to listing). Above the suspended ceiling, all trace of former finishes has been removed.*

## Exterior

The exterior of the building remains, to a large extent, intact. It still conveys the architectural style and the constructional detailing of the original design, although these have been diluted in a number of areas. The horizontal emphasis of the design and the hierarchical and axial arrangement of the building are typical of the period and of Musman's innovative work. These characteristics remain intact. The majority of the Crittall windows, string courses, long bricks and recessed pointing also remain intact.

A number of extensions have been carried out which have increased the overall footprint of the building and resulted in the original plan form of the building being compromised. Most of these adaptations have been granted consent since the building was listed in 1981. The original service yard at the rear of the building has been partly n-filled to create a reception/foyer area which has removed the screen wall on the east side. It has also screened the original rear elevation where it existed beneath the overbridge extension. A number of windows, which originally served the original bathrooms and WCs, have also been infilled in this area. The original garages and staff accommodation have been heavily remodelled. This is connected to the large modern hotel building of the 1970s which, although discreet in some viewpoints, is actively harmful to the appearance and setting of the listed building in others.

In terms of assigning heritage value to the extant building, we consider that the exterior possesses a **good/medium** level of significance.



*To the rear of the building, the hotel has been expanded with a large modern addition. The overall design and materials stands at a stark contrast to the original building, and appear as two very separate elements.*



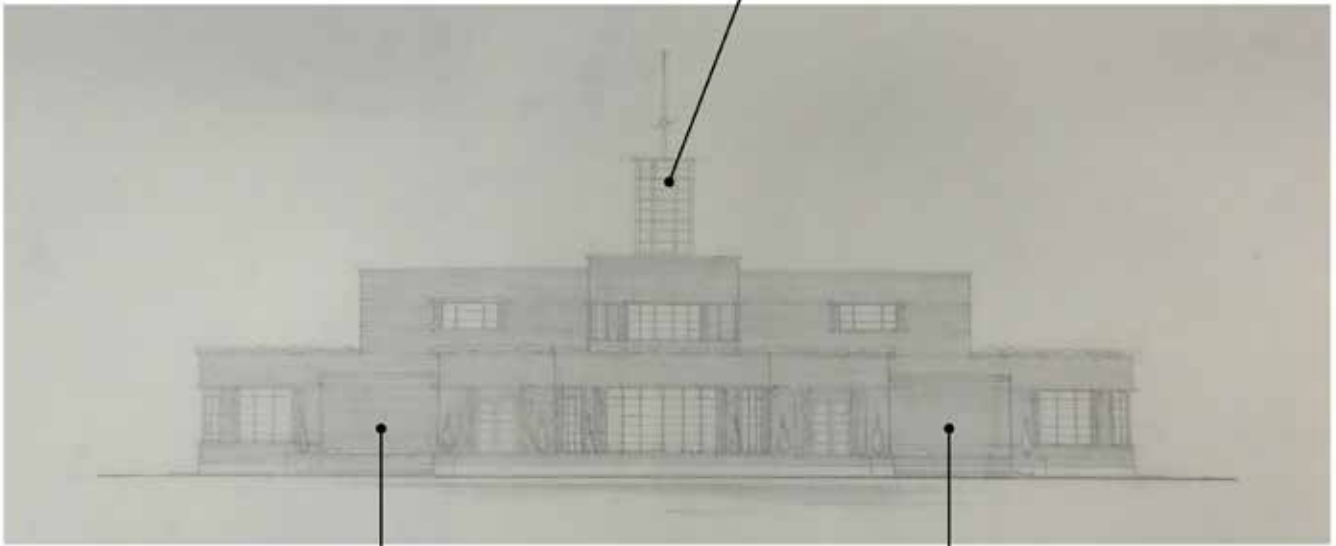
*Externally the building has had a number of unsympathetic alterations in terms of addition signage, lights and repair work.*



*Unsympathetic extensions and additions have been added over time including a small extension to the side of the main bar, and the infilling of the rear courtyard and creation of the reception area.*



Original lantern and flagpole removed, prior to listing



Original WC areas opened to bar area and windows added

Later 'bridge' extension at first floor sketched over this plan of March 1936

More solid, original design for lantern not built



Original screen wall to service yard removed and replaced by modern foyer

Original WC area opened up to bar area and windows added

Original WC areas opened to bar area and windows added

## Significance of setting

The setting of the Comet is considered to comprise two elements: the 'immediate' setting of the building and its 'extended' setting. This categorisation of setting corresponds with the experience of the surroundings, and also assists in defining those elements of setting which actively contribute to significance and those which contribute less or are neutral in effect.

The original setting of the Comet Hotel has altered very significantly since its construction, and its current condition detracts from the asset's significance.

### Immediate Setting

The immediate setting of the Comet is formed by the landscape in which it sits. This includes the car park hard-standing, grass verges, trees, the statue, modern buildings to the rear and the frontage with the adjacent highways, including Comet Way.

The car park hard-standing, although creating a harder landscape, allows clear views of the Comet Hotel when approached south along Comet Way, resulting in the historic context of the property, being retained to some degree. Although there is a large area of parking dominance in the front part of the site, the surrounding landscaping, including the grass verges and trees, has the effect of softening the overall appearance.

To the front of the property is a sculptural statue, depicting a Comet aircraft. This is contemporary with the building and adds to the understanding of the site's historic interest.

These elements therefore make a **low to medium** contribution to the significance of the building.

The adjacent highway infrastructure makes **no** contribution to the significance of the building and, in fact, serves to detract from the contribution made by setting. The modern hotel buildings at the rear also serve to detract from the significance of the building as a result of their jarring utilitarian design and material choice and colour.

Although these elements fall within the setting of the building, the contribution that they make to the significance of the site is considered to be either **none** or **harmful** as a result of their visual impact, design or appearance.

### Extended Setting

The extended setting of the listed building is considered to be formed by the adjacent built form of the University of Hertfordshire to the north west, the housing developments to the south and west, the Hatfield Football Academy to the east and the Galleria and industrial estate to the north.

Originally designed as the axial vista-stop to the road now called Comet Way, the hotel building is now rather isolated within the large scale highway engineering that has stemmed from the growth of Hatfield. Where once the building was a focus along Comet Way, it is now possible to miss it altogether.

The longer distance views of the building from the south are of limited merit at present, and it would be beneficial to achieve enhancement of the highway setting, as well as the immediate setting of the hotel, to help engender more complementary surroundings for the building.

From the west side, the setting of the building is equally challenged, dominated by highway engineering. The flank elevation of the building is long and low and the existing hotel extension accentuates this characteristic, although not in a positive architectural or urban design manner. The result is that the listed building cannot readily be appreciated from this approach.

From the east side, the existing landscaping, trees, grass verge and grass roundabouts are beneficial to the building's setting.

The rear (south) of the site feels somewhat detached from the listed building. This is due principally to the strict orientation of the building northwards, with the former staff range at the rear marking the 'back' of the listed building.

The existing trees on the south-east side of the car park also create a definition between the front and rear of the site. In addition, the presence of the existing white-clad hotel extension also marks a separation from the listed building. From many locations on the north and east sides, this extension cannot be viewed within the setting of the listed building and its presence is discreet.





*The view south-westwards from Comet Way across the roundabout at the junction with St Albans Road West towards the Comet Hotel. Due to the building's relatively low level and emphasis, it does not perform a strong landmarking role at this distance, particularly in view of the foreground road surfaces, signage and lighting columns. Contribution of this setting to the significance of the asset is **low**. The scale and dominance of the highway engineering is harmful.*



*The view westwards from Comet Way towards the front (north) and side (east) elevations of the Comet Hotel. Although there is some foreground intrusion caused by the highway engineering, the low form of the hotel can be made out, as can the rounded bat elements. From this viewpoint, the current condition of this setting is not beneficial and makes only a **low** level of contribution to significance. The scale and visual dominance of the highway engineering is harmful.*



*The view from the front of the site, adjoining the roundabout, provides the optimum vista towards the composition of the hotel design, with the front and side bays clearly visible and the 'stacking' of the forms legible. The sculpture pedestal of the Comet also contributes to the understanding of the asset, although there is a dominance of parked cars and little landscaping to soften the setting.*

*Nevertheless, the contribution of this setting to the significance of the asset is **medium**.*



*The view from Comet Way towards the east elevation of the hotel benefits from a wide foreground verge and also mature trees which provide a softening of the setting as well as a screening effect of the existing hotel extension to the rear. Compared with the car-dominated spaces to the north and west, this approach to the building has a gentler and more spacious feel.*

*The contribution of this setting to the significance of the asset is **medium**.*



*The view along the north-western side of the site (along St Albans Road West), looks onto the utilitarian hotel extension, clad in white panels. Although the presence of built form is not detrimental to the setting of the listed building in principle, the design and appearance of the existing structure is **harmful** to the architectural quality of the listed building and its setting. As a result of its poor architectural quality and stark visual contrast, it actively detracts from the appreciation of the 1930s hotel building.*

*The foreground verge provides some softening of the setting but it is largely car-dominated and makes a **low** level of contribution.*



*The land to the rear (south) of the hotel buildings is used for car parking at present. It is generally open, with established landscaping and trees along the south and east boundaries. It has an enclosed feel but does not have a strong relationship with the listed building due to the physical distance and separation caused by the modern extension.*

*The contribution of this setting to the significance of the asset is **low**.*



In summarising the contribution of the existing setting to the listed building's significance, our opinion is that the setting varies between **low-medium** and **none-harmful**.

The front (northern) part of the site has the potential to contribute more positively to the setting and significance of the listed building and enhancements of this area would be welcomed. It is of **low-medium** significance. The rear (southern) half of the site has less direct relationships with the listed building and it therefore contributes less to significance. It is of **low/no** significance. Elements within the setting which actively detract are referred to as being **harmful**.



Significance level:



High



Medium



Low



None



None- Harmful



The Comet

## 7. Proposed Scheme

The proposed scheme has been informed and advised by the research findings presented in the first part of this document. The evidence provided by the architect's plans of 1936 has helped to identify the parts of the plan- and built-form that continue to hold significance, and those where adaptation has occurred. The evolution of the design process, informed by this research, has been the subject of the pre-application meetings with the planning and conservation officers of Welwyn Hatfield Council.

In terms of explaining and presenting the current proposals, our appraisal of the building and setting is summarised in the diagram below. The diagram illustrates the clear role of the listed building as a vista-stop and landmark at the road junction - albeit that this role has been diluted over time as a result of the increases in, and dominance of, traffic measures. However, this north-eastern half of the site (the front) continues to play a visual role locally and proposals for development should seek to enhance this role.

In contrast, the existing extension to the rear of the listed building is harmful to its architectural and historic interest, and its setting. Its utilitarian

appearance presents negative elevations to each aspect. It offers no positive architectural relationship with the listed building. Where it is visible, it is detrimental to the listed building's setting. Therefore, in seeking re-development of the site, it is desirable to address the existing, harmful visual impacts of this existing extension.

The proposed scheme is for the refurbishment of the Grade II listed Comet Hotel, the demolition of the existing extension and the re-development of the rear of the site for hotel and student accommodation use.

The listed building will continue to be used for hotel and dining purposes, with social space on the first floor. A replacement hotel extension would be constructed to the rear and a series of separate buildings erected for student accommodation.

The scheme has been designed to retain the maximum amount of existing landscaping as well as proposals to enhance the landscape setting of the listed building at the front of the site.

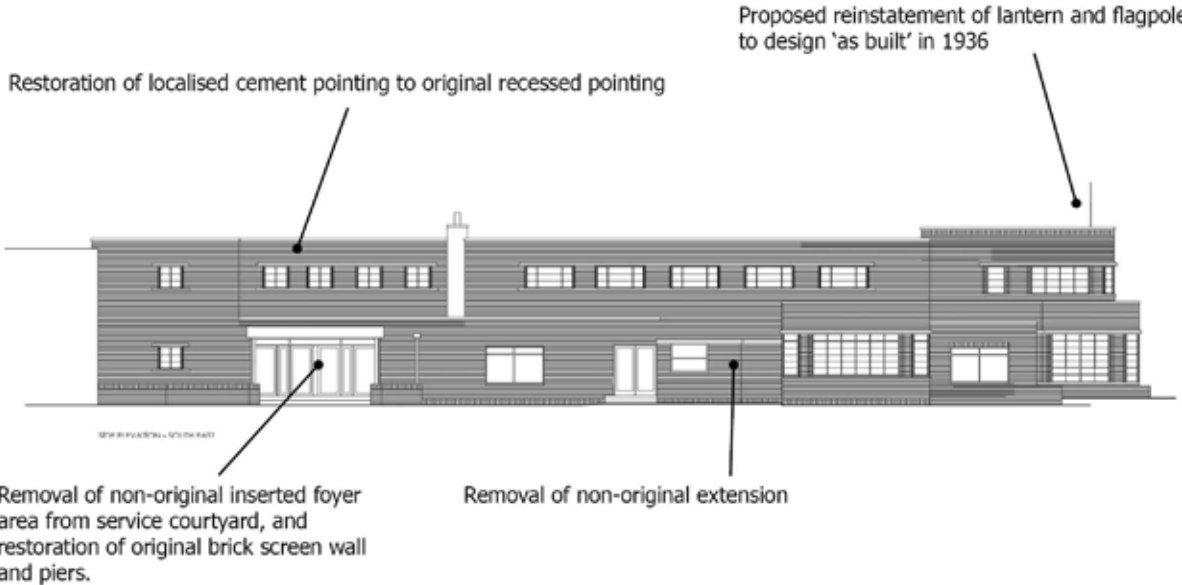
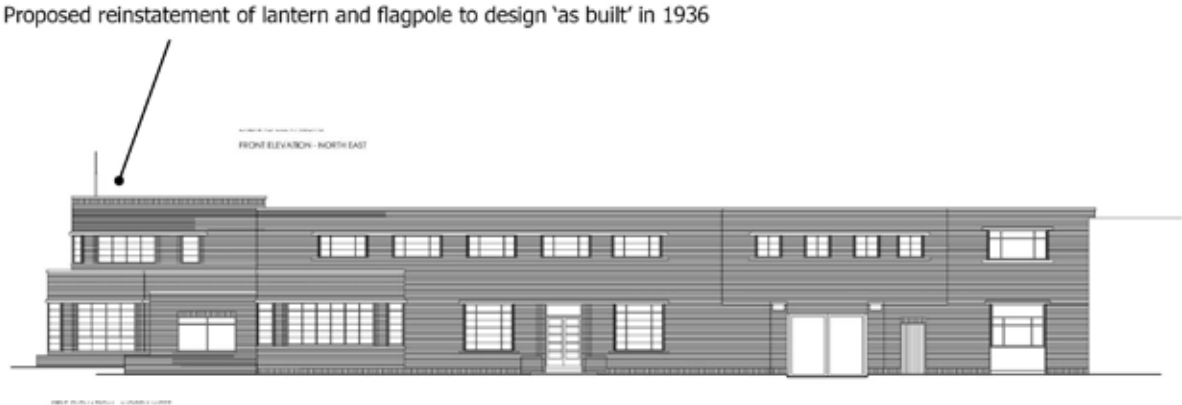
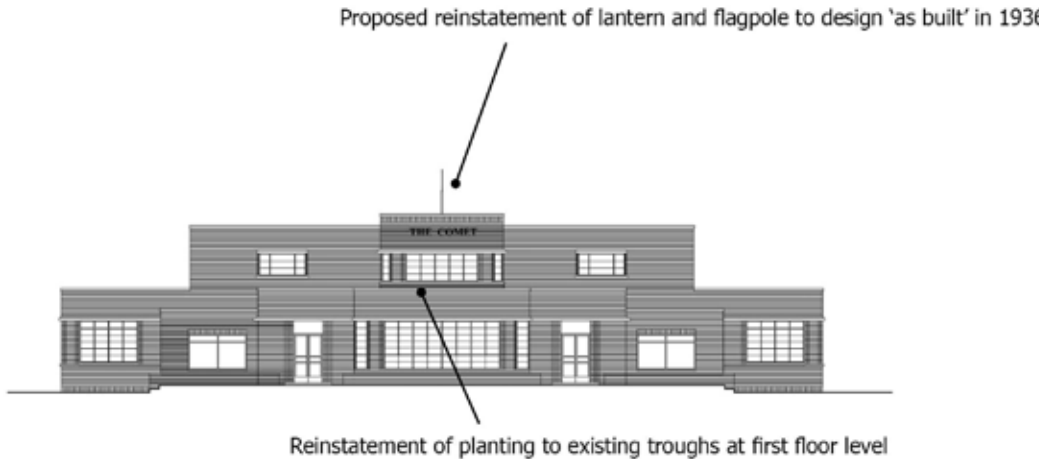


Site analysis

- Listed building
- ↗ Viewpoints/vistas
- Poor built edge/harmful
- Hard-standing



In addition to principles guiding the design approach for the site as a whole, there have also been some key parameters identified for alteration and enhancement of the listed building. The principal of these, as they affect the exterior of the building, are identified below, including reinstatement of the glazed lantern on the front elevation of the building, removal of the modern extensions and reinstatement of the service yard walls and piers. These were all identified at an early stage in the design process as significant heritage benefits to the architectural and historic interest of the listed building.



## Proposed plan-form concept

Internally, the research evidence has guided proposals for enhancement of the existing building in the knowledge of its significance. As the project involves refurbishment of the existing building, the demands on the building structure and fabric are limited. The opportunity has therefore been taken to undertake beneficial enhancements of the building's original features where possible, in line with the proposals outlined on the previous page.

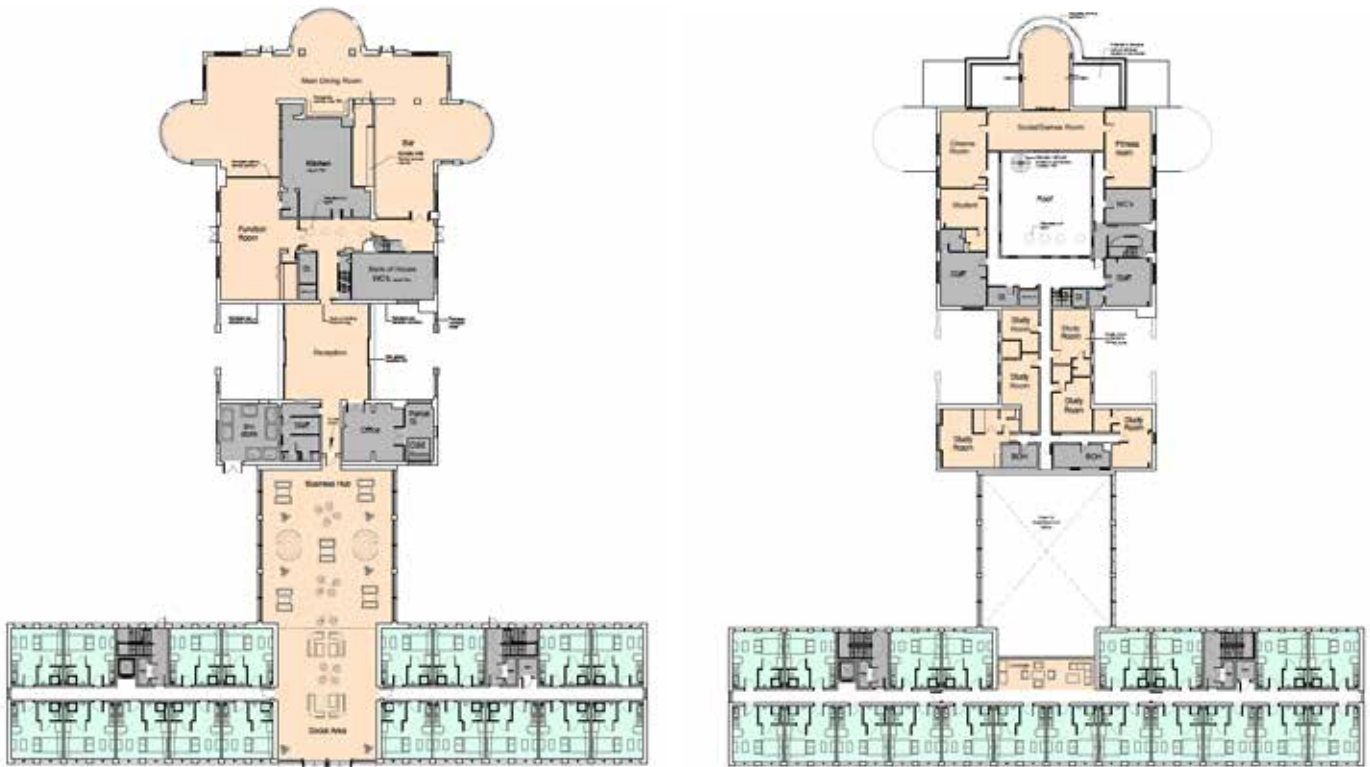
As a result, the plan-form at ground floor level remains largely as existing, but with the modern extension and foyer removed. This enables reinstatement of the original building form and service yard, with a simple, glazed reception formed beneath the overbridge.

The principal rooms remain as existing, and all features of merit also remain intact. Existing WC

areas are relocated into the rear range (where the garaging used to be located), enabling the former rear door to be re-opened for public use. The former screen walls and piers would be reinstated on the east side of the service yard to create a protected entrance courtyard.

At first floor level, the plan-form also remains very similar to the existing. The principal alteration is to amalgamate some of the smaller spaces at the front of the building to create more usable function rooms - and particularly to support the beneficial use of the viewing gallery which tends to be underused due to its isolated position (despite it being one of the key spaces in the building).

The remainder of the cellular plan-form at first floor remains intact and it will therefore remain possible to appreciate how the original arrangement operated.



*Proposed ground and first floor layout plans*

## Internal alterations

In order to implement the proposed internal works, a number of modern partitions would be removed to facilitate the improvements. These are marked on the plans below, and demonstrate the limited impact of the alterations involved and the extent to which these affect only modern, non-original fabric.

The proposed works illustrated below will not affect the significance of the listed building in a harmful way. In fact, a number of them bring considerable benefit: such as the removal of the modern side extension and foyer infill - both of which have been harmful to the form and architectural character of the existing building.



*Proposed demolition plans*

## New-build development

The proposals for the site are informed by the site analysis and the fundamental requirement to preserve the setting of the listed building and, wherever possible, to enhance it as part of the designed scheme.

To this end, the scheme aims to better express the original form and architectural quality of the listed building by removing the detracting, modern additions and through reinstatement of original features (such as the glazed lantern, screen walls and piers). The proposed elevations below indicate how these alterations would represent improvements to the listed building and, by strengthening of its architectural quality, help to enhance its role as a local landmark.



*Existing view towards Comet Hotel from north-east*



*Proposed view towards Comet Hotel from north-east*

The proposed scheme is based on the pre-requisite of removing the existing extensions at the rear of the hotel. As has been established, these are of no architectural merit and their removal offers the potential to achieve considerable improvement of the setting and appearance of the listed building.

In terms of the design parameters guiding the proposed replacement development, these follow the principles set out in the site analysis. The aim is to maintain and promote the prominence of the listed building, and its axial role on the site, and to enhance the design quality of the site as a whole.

This requires a firm line to be established to the rear of the listed building, maintaining and enhancing the front-most parts of the site which contribute most to its setting. Behind this line, the proposed development can be located with minimal impact on the setting of the listed building in layout terms, effectively creating a 'backdrop' to the existing building which keeps it clear of built form and enhances its architectural quality.



The proposed scheme is based on a plan form with stepped blocks which are orientated away from the adjacent residential development to the south west. These blocks allow student courtyards to be created with lawned areas and trees, enhancing the landscape value of the site. The layout reflects the rectilinear arrangement of the listed building and its orientation, set within the rear (south-west) half of the site which makes either low or no contribution to the setting of the listed building.

The impact deriving from building height has been very carefully assessed during the development of the scheme to ensure that impacts on the special interest and setting of the listed building will not be harmful. To meet this objective need not automatically imply a matching or lower height than the existing building, but is dependent on the resultant *impact* of the proposal on the asset's significance, and the contribution which setting makes to that significance. This is in addition to the positive benefits that a better-designed building and site may bring (in accordance with the provisions of the NPPF).

Currently, the contribution made by setting to significance varies between **medium** and **harmful** due to the poor quality of the existing hotel extension and the condition of the car parking and landscaping. There are significance opportunities to improve upon this situation, and the carefully-modelled height of re-developed buildings, and their design quality, can help to enhance the attributes of the site and setting.

Where elements of the scheme are taller in elevation than the existing Comet Hotel, the design approach has been carefully considered. The stepping of the proposed blocks alongside the use of high quality materials and detailing ensure that the new additions appear subservient to the existing building and do not compete for focus. When viewed from the front of the site, the Comet remains the dominant element in the foreground, and appears to be framed by new blocks drawing the eye centrally to the principal building.

A guiding principle of the layout is also to retain existing trees where they contribute to the visual qualities of the site, notably the group to the south-east of the listed building and also around the perimeter of the site.



Proposed site plan

The proposed layout indicates how the detail of the scheme would follow the principles established in the site analysis and concept plan. The scheme demonstrates how the proposed blocks could be positioned in such a way as to result in an acceptable relationship with the listed building.

The proposed replacement hotel extension takes the form of a simple 3-storey range located parallel to the existing rear range of the 1930s building, linked to it by means of a 2 storey connection. This simple layout and form does not challenge the prominence of the listed building and it does not rise noticeably above it. In addition, the simple framed elevational design ensures that the external treatment does not distract from the simplicity of the Art Deco hotel.



*Visualisation from viewpoint in Comey Way (hedge in highway verge not to be provided by applicant)*

The third floor level of the replacement block is set back from the building both to the front and sides. This allows the perceived bulk of the building to be reduced and replicates the stepped nature of the Comet building itself. As a result, the hotel extension does not draw focus from the listed building and, as such, the slight variance in overall height is imperceptible in the majority of views towards the hotel, as the visualisations show. The slight difference in height is not in itself a negative effect where resultant impacts cannot be appreciated as being harmful in any way.



*Proposed visualisation of glazed link and replacement rear block*



The proposed buildings to the north-west and south-east of the site form an appropriate edge in each location. On the south-east side, the two four-storey blocks respond to the higher level of Comet Way adjacent and will largely be screened from views from the east and also from positions east of the listed building as a result of the retained trees within the site.

The block on the north-west side, adjoining St Albans Road West, sits behind the retained hedge frontage but, at four storeys, offers a positive response to the busy road junction in urban design terms. Positioned as they are, with the top storeys set back from the building line, the taller blocks will not challenge the two storey height of the listed building, and would act as a framing tool, drawing the eye to the principal building in a context where it is currently isolated and, at times, lost.



*The above visualisation is produced from a viewpoint to the north-east of the hotel, in a position which is largely inaccessible due to the presence of the roundabout and traffic. It is, however, the main axial view towards the listed building. As the image shows, the listed building retains a high level of prominence on the site as a result of the proposals, but the immediate frontage would be softened by the proposed changes to the car park area in the foreground. The hotel extension is almost imperceptible from this position. Due to the distance behind the listed building, the proposed extension is not directly comparable with it - and the listed building remains wholly prominent. The four storey blocks, as a result of their position relative to the listed building and the reduced bulk at the fourth floor level, also do not result in a harmful impact to the Comet's interest or setting. Compared with the existing situation, the visualisation illustrates how significant the levels of enhancement would be to the site, setting and quality of built form as a whole.*



The proposed buildings to the south-west of the listed building and hotel extension would be three storeys in height and would not, therefore, be visible in views behind the Comet - even in long views along Comet Way. They are carefully positioned in relation to the boundaries to enable the existing landscaping to flourish and to retain the contribution of the trees in the longer range views of the site.

The landscaping at the front of the site includes an extended lawn area, which is contained within a low plinth wall and hedge arrangement. This provides a greater level of protection to the listed building and helps to soften its setting. In addition, the car parking arrangement has been reorganised to allow for fewer spaces around the perimeter of the building, thereby increasing landscaped area. This will help the building to 'sit' in its context more successfully whilst also accommodating the vehicles which will support the building's use.



*Aerial view north of proposed scheme (hedge in highway verge not to be provided by applicant)*



*Car free courtyard and stepped building lines create a social outdoor amenity space. Landscaping scheme to be developed.*



## Landscape Scheme

The condition of existing landscaping on the site, particularly around the listed building itself, is one of its least satisfactory elements in terms of the resultant impact on the setting of the listed building.

The opportunity to make enhancements to the layout and landscaping in the immediate context of the listed building was identified at the earliest stage in this project, and it has also been recognised by officers as a potential benefit throughout the pre-application process.

Although the original site layout of the Comet, when built, was largely dominated by hard surface parking area, the wider context was not as engineered as it is today. The scale of Comet Way and St Albans Road West has increased significantly since the 1930s, and area of hard surface in the wider setting has increased dramatically. As a result, the environment of the listed building has become harsh and it is recognised that it would benefit from an increase in soft landscaping and also improved definition of its immediate grounds - accompanied by a rationalisation of existing parking arrangements to allow this to occur.

The principles of the proposed landscaping scheme have therefore sought to achieve those ends. The results have been as follows:

- a more ordered arrangement of the parking area to reflect the presence of the listed building and to increase its prominence;
- removal of existing parking spaces from the front and side of the listed building to reduce the impact of parked vehicles and to allow for increased definition of the building and soft

landscaping;

- removal of parking spaces at the front of the building to allow for the creation of an open, lawned and hedged area which connects the building with the Comet sculpture. This not only softens the setting but also helps to increase the definition of the two structures in the wider context of the traffic junction;
- creation of an enlarged outdoor seating area at the front of the building will enhance the use and enjoyment of the facility;
- new tree planting on the south-east and north-west parts of the site. On the south-east side, this will augment existing retained trees. On the north-west side, this will enhance an area which is very hard in character at present;
- improvement of the entrance/foyer courtyard area to include landscaping.

In addition to these measures which affect the site layout, it is also proposed to reinstate the planters on the flat-roofed sections of listed building itself. These still exist on the flat roofs behind the parapets, and would originally have been planted up to give an additional, subtle definition of the building's lines. It is proposed to reinstate these features which will also add to the softening of the building in its context, and represents a further benefit to the building's special interest.

Taken together, the proposal for landscaping aims to address one of the existing setting's weakest elements, which actively detract from the appreciation of the building's architecture and prominence. The scheme proposed will help to reinstate the listed building as the focus of the site.



*Proposed landscaping masterplan*

## 8. Impact Assessment

### The Comet - internal and external alterations:

The proposed alterations to the listed hotel will have a very minor impact on the significance of the building. As described earlier, almost all the proposed alterations relate to the removal of modern work. The removal of limited partitions at first floor is of very minor extent and not impacting on the significance of the listed building.

The proposals are therefore considered to cause **no harm** to the significance of the listed building and preserve its architectural and historic interest. In addition, there are a number of benefits proposed as part of this scheme, including the demolition of the existing reception area and its replacement with a lightweight glass link which better expresses the architectural quality of the building. This will also enable the rear courtyard to be re-formed, with the original screen walls

re-built. Due to the materials and detailed design of the new reception link, clear sight lines through from one side of the courtyard to the other will be achieved allowing the original open courtyard area to be better appreciated.

It is also proposed to demolish the small bar extension to the side of the building, which has been recently added. This extension currently detracts from the intended appearance of this elevation and its removal would be of benefit. A further, major benefit will be found in the reinstatement of the original lantern at roof level. This will restore one of the building's most important features, and one which will help to reinstate its role as a local landmark as well as an exemplar of Art Deco design.

By reversing these previous negative adaptations, these works, together, will represent a **medium to major positive** impact on the significance of the listed building.



*Existing hotel block accommodation*



*The view towards the front elevation will be improved by the reinstatement of the lantern, one of its most important original features*



*Proposed development (hedge in highway verge not to be provided by applicant)*

## Proposed New Development

The existing hotel extension presents a strong visual and design contrast with the listed building in its design and construction quality and choice of materials. Due to its appearance and location at the immediate rear of the listed building, it does not enhance the heritage assets or its setting in anyway. In fact, its contrasting quality and character is harmful to the listed building and its setting. The removal of this extension would represent a benefit, “better revealing” the significance of the heritage asset, and provides an opportunity to enhance the setting of the principal building.

The proposed development seeks the replacement of the existing extension with a structure which better reflects the status and architectural quality of the listed building. It will sit directly behind the principal building and will be treated as a masonry structure with large glazed elements to differ, but not to challenge, the existing listed building. In terms of its height, the proposed extension will be 3 storeys but it has been designed to be set down and back from the building line to reduce any adverse impact on the listed building. The top floor will be recessed. As a result, it will not rise above the listed building in the most important views from the north-west.

As the photomontages show, the proposed extension will sit very quietly behind the existing building, replacing the existing harmful extension with a building which respects its presence and the need for it to remain prominent.

The proposed student accommodation located behind the proposed hotel extension will be built to a height of three storeys and, as such, its impact on the listed building on this part of the site will be **nil**. The three taller elements to each side of the site increase in height to four storeys. Although this is taller than the listed building, these blocks are set well behind the hotel building itself and have very little impact on it or on views towards to - all of which are protected in the front ‘half’ of the site. The blocks on the south-east side of the site would be screened behind retained trees; the block on the north-west side, addresses St Albans Road West and is expressed as an entrance point to the student accommodation, reflecting best urban design practice. Again, its presence will not have any harmful impact on the setting of the listed building.

The proposals shown in the landscaping scheme achieve an increase in planting within the front forecourt area and particularly at the front and side of the listed building. These improvements would be **beneficial** to the setting of the listed building.

In our opinion, the scheme as a whole removes elements that are actively detracting from the appreciation of the listed building, replacing them with a well-designed scheme which has been carefully approached to ensure that the listed building remains prominent and that its landmark role is supported by new-build development of a high quality. We consider that the proposals would have a **medium positive** impact on the setting of



*Proposed development (hedge in highway verge not to be provided by applicant)*



## Mile Post

The proposed student block on the north-west side of the site will face towards the milepost and its height will be greater than the existing hotel extension. The effect of this change is not to harm the setting of the milepost, whose position within the verge on the opposite side of the road will remain unchanged. It must be acknowledged also that the milepost's existing setting is already eroded to a considerable extent due to the scale of road infrastructure around it, and that its current location is unlikely to have been its original location.

The impact of the proposed development on the Grade II listed milepost on the north side of St Albans Road West will be **nil**.

We are therefore satisfied that there would be **no harm** arising from the proposed development on the significance or setting of the milepost, and its architectural and historic interest would be preserved.

## 9. Heritage Benefits

In the context of Section 12 of the NPPF, and in the event that the development is assessed by the Local Planning Authority to cause “less than substantial harm” (NPPF Paragraph 134), it is relevant to set out the heritage benefits which we consider would accrue as the result of the current proposal. These benefits, alongside other aspects of public benefit, would be considered in the context of a scheme where “less than substantial harm” may be caused.

Heritage benefits include the removal of harmful elements, as well as proposed works considered to enhance the fabric, architectural character or quality, or setting of a heritage asset. These are set out below:

Proposed item	Level of benefit
Removal of existing poor quality hotel extension from rear of existing building	MAJOR BENEFICIAL
Removal of lobby extension to reinstate original courtyard and screen wall	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Reinstatement of lantern on listed building	HIGH BENEFICIAL
Repair and reinstatement of previous brickwork alterations/pointing	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Removal of side bar extension and reinstatement of original wall position	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Re-configuration of parking area to increase landscaping	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Formation of outdoor landscaped area to connect hotel to Comet sign	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Reinstatement of former public bar and lounge bar plan-form	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Reinstatement of planting in former troughs on building elevations	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Formation of detached hotel extension, designed to increase the identity of the listed building in its altered townscape	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL
Enhancement of the viable use of the listed building and its upper floor	MEDIUM BENEFICIAL

## 10. Summary

The current application proposes the refurbishment of the Grade II listed Comet Hotel, the demolition of the existing extensions to the rear and the re-development of the rear of the site as a replacement hotel extension and student accommodation.

Following detailed assessment and archival research, the overall significance of the building has been found to vary between good, medium and low levels. The exterior retains some good elements of its original design, but the quality of the interior has been considerably reduced as a result of alteration and adaptation. Careful assessment of setting has also been undertaken.

This significance assessment work has guided the emerging design of the proposals which have been discussed in detail at pre-application stage. Throughout this process, special regard has been paid to the provisions of the Planning (LB&CA) Act 1990, particularly the desirability of preserving the special interest of the listed building and its setting.

This approach is demonstrated in the steps taken in the layout, form and design of the proposed new development, and also in the careful response to the internal plan-form of the listed building and the opportunities available for reinstating original features.

In terms of the proposed works to the building itself, some very minor adverse effects have been highlighted as part of the assessment. These impacts arise due to the alteration of a small number of internal walls to the ground and first floor of the listed building - but these have no harmful impact on the building's overall significance.

In terms of assessment of the scheme in the context of the NPPF, it is our opinion that the scheme provides positive benefits for the listed building (including better revealing its significance through the removal of harmful objects and the reinstatement of original features) and also to its setting resulting from the replacement of a poor existing extension with a development of high design quality. Both will enhance the identity and distinctiveness of the Comet Hotel as part of a regeneration of its current, poor setting.

In summary, the proposals pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building, in accordance with Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

We also consider that no harm would be caused to the significance of the heritage asset or the contribution made by setting to that significance, in accordance with the NPPF. Indeed, we find that the proposals would bring a **medium beneficial** enhancement of the listed building and its setting, as part of a high quality re-development of the site which places the heritage asset as its clear focus.

If the Local Planning Authority considers a level of harm to be caused, at the level of "less than substantial", then this statement and the evidence set out in the accompanying Planning Statement, will provide a context for assessing public benefits arising from the development proposal to counter any perceived negative impact on heritage.

In its careful response to the special interest and setting of the listed building, the proposed scheme also meets the requirements of Policies R25, D1 and D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan. In addition, the special interest and setting of the Grade II listed milepost in St Albans Road West would also be preserved.



**APPENDIX 1**  
**LIST DESCRIPTIONS**

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Historic England

# THE COMET PUBLIC HOUSE

## List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: THE COMET PUBLIC HOUSE

List entry Number: 1101036

## Location

THE COMET PUBLIC HOUSE, BARNET BY PASS

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Hertfordshire

District: Welwyn Hatfield

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Hatfield

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 06-Jul-1981

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

## Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 158340

## Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

## List entry Description

### Summary of Building

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

### Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

### History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

### Details

TL 20 NW HATFIELD Hatfield BARNET BY-PASS 8/77 (west side)

6.7.81 The Comet Public House

- II

Hotel. 1933. By E B Musman. Red brick with stone dressings on steel frame. The plan is supposedly in the form of an aeroplane. Two storeys. Projecting centrepiece with rounded end, the ground floor projects beyond the first. Wings on either side, also half round, single storey only. Five window side elevations. Largely original steel framed windows, the two modern ones in

the front elevations are openings in originally blank walls. Clipsham stone dressings strip above and below windows and to parapets. Flat roofs not visible, the original roof lantern has been removed. The interior has been altered. A pioneer hotel in the modern style.

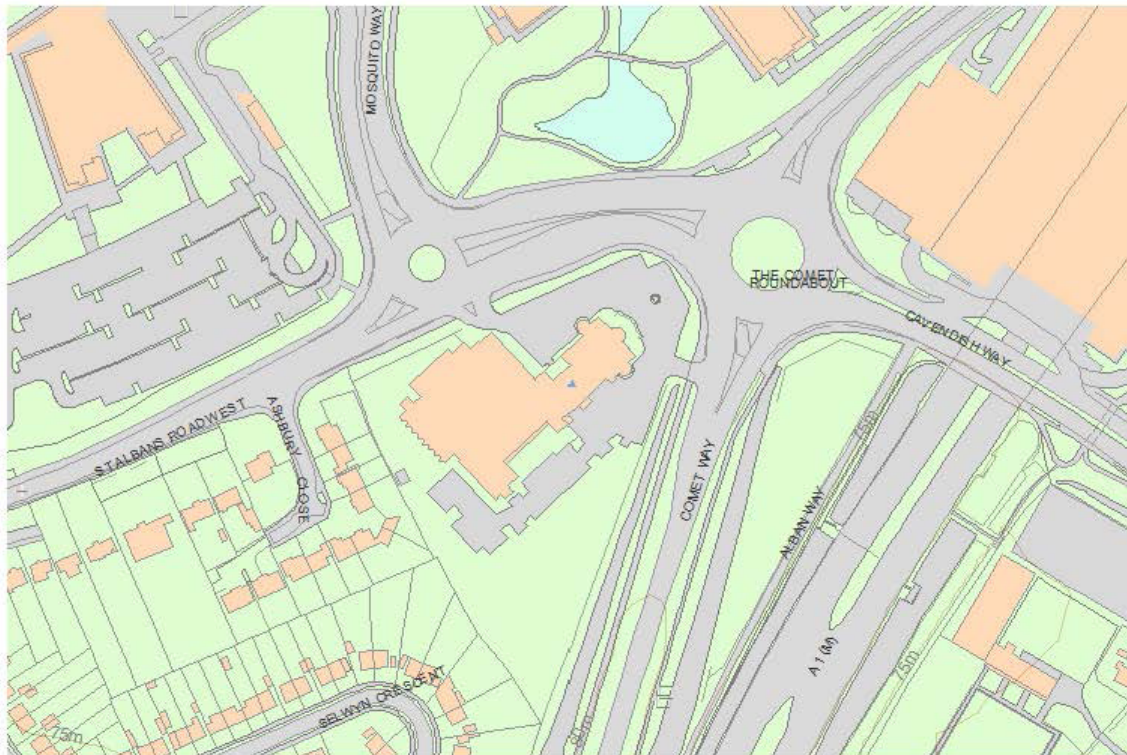
Listing NGR: TL2127408291

## Selected Sources

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details

National Grid Reference: TL 21274 08291

## Map



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For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - [1101036 .pdf \(http://mapservices.HistoricEngland.org.uk/printwebservice/hle/StatutoryPrint.svc/373697/HLE\\_A4L\\_Grade/HLE\\_A3L\\_Grade.pdf\)](http://mapservices.HistoricEngland.org.uk/printwebservice/hle/StatutoryPrint.svc/373697/HLE_A4L_Grade/HLE_A3L_Grade.pdf)

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End of official listing





Historic England

# MILEPOST TO WEST OF COMET ROUNDBOUT, OPPOSITE COMET PUBLIC HOUSE

## List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: MILEPOST TO WEST OF COMET ROUNDBOUT, OPPOSITE COMET PUBLIC HOUSE

List entry Number: 1100903

## Location

MILEPOST TO WEST OF COMET ROUNDBOUT, OPPOSITE COMET PUBLIC HOUSE, HATFIELD ROAD

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Hertfordshire

District: Welwyn Hatfield

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Hatfield

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 10-Dec-1986

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

## Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 158642

## Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

## List entry Description

### Summary of Building

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

### Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

### History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

### Details

TL 20 NW HATFIELD Ellenbrook HATFIELD ROAD (north side) 8/300 Milepost to west of Comet roundabout, GV opposite Comet Public House

II

Milepost. Circa 1820. Cast iron, painted. Triangular plan, open at back.

Triangular top (damaged). Chamfered face below. Inscribed on top: HATFIELD

1; on right side ST ALBANS 4, READING 49; on left side inscription renewed in paint.

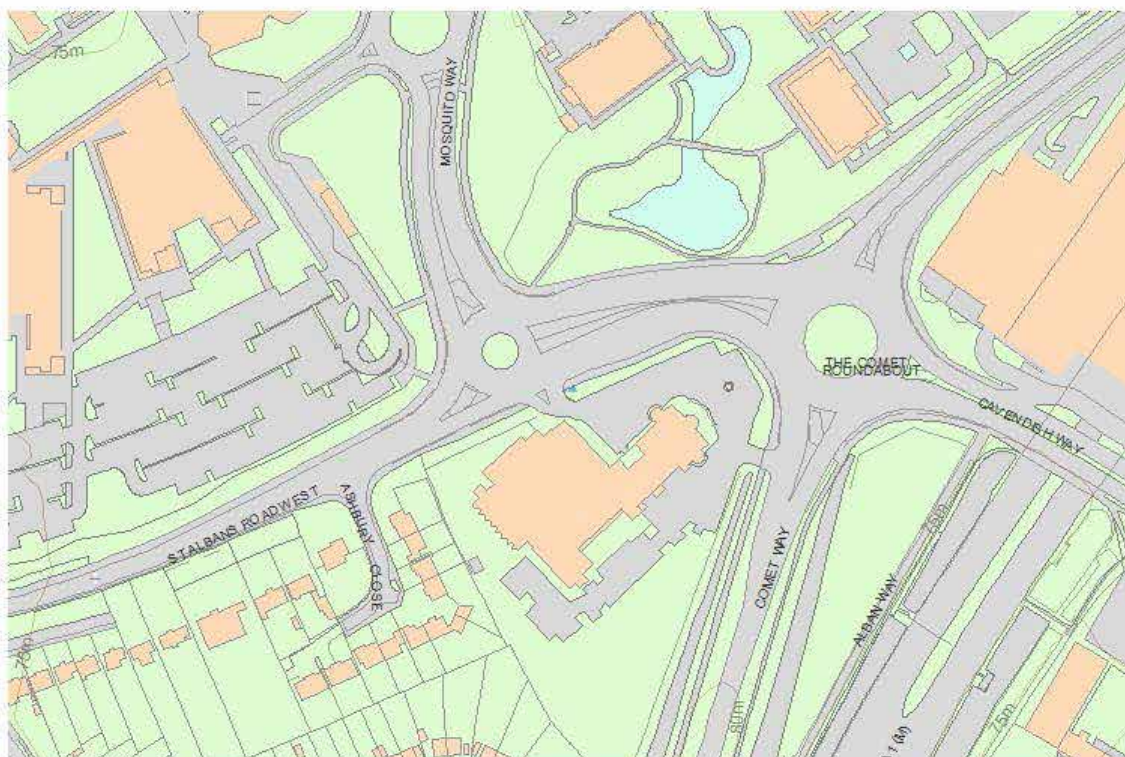
Listing NGR: TL2124208327

## Selected Sources

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details

National Grid Reference: TL 21242 08327

## Map



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For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - [1100903 .pdf \(http://mapservices.HistoricEngland.org.uk/printwebservice/hle/StatutoryPrint.svc/98914/HLE\\_A4L\\_Grade|HLE\\_A3L\\_Grade.pdf\)](http://mapservices.HistoricEngland.org.uk/printwebservice/hle/StatutoryPrint.svc/98914/HLE_A4L_Grade|HLE_A3L_Grade.pdf)

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