GORDON YOUNG ARCHITECTS

# 5 - 7 High Street,
# St Neots
# PE19 1DE
# Design & Access Statement

Rev:A - 20.10.2026



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# 1. Introduction

*1.1* This Design & Access Statement has been produced on behalf of **Steki Investments Ltd** to accompany an application for Planning Permission for the proposed ***alterations to the existing commercial premises, including the subdivision of the existing Class E commercial unit to form three independent Class E commercial units (two at ground floor and one at first floor), together with replacement shopfronts, new recessed entrances and associated access improvements*** *at*

**5–7 High Street, St Neots, PE19 1DE**

1.2 The application has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order and demonstrates how the proposed development responds positively to its setting while providing a high quality and fully accessible commercial frontage. The proposals have been developed from the measured survey drawings and site appraisal undertaken for the property.

1.3 The proposals have been carefully developed to enhance the visual quality of the frontage while respecting the architectural character of the host building and its sensitive townscape context.

1.4 The application seeks planning permission for:

- Alteration and complete replacement of the existing ground floor shopfront.
- Subdivision of the existing Class E commercial unit to form three independent Class E commercial units (two at ground floor and one at first floor).
- Installation of two new recessed glazed entrance lobbies.
- Formation of compliant external access ramps to provide level access from the public footway.
- Installation of new full-height glazed shopfronts.
- Associated alterations to glazing, framing and entrance doors.

No alterations are proposed to the principal structure of the building.

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1.5 The design has been developed with the following objectives:

- Improve the architectural quality of the existing frontage.
- Deliver a more active and attractive High Street elevation.
- Improve accessibility for all users.
- Increase flexibility of commercial accommodation.
- Support the continued vitality of St Neots Town Centre.
- Create a contemporary yet respectful design appropriate to its town centre location.
- Create smaller, flexible commercial units that respond to local market demand, providing more accessible and affordable premises for independent businesses and supporting the vitality and viability of St Neots town centre.

## 2. Site Context

2.1 The application site occupies a prominent position on the eastern side of High Street within the principal commercial area of St Neots town centre.

2.2 The property comprises a two-stories commercial building with retail frontage at ground floor level and office accommodation above. The existing building is not listed and lies within a predominantly commercial streetscape characterised by a wide variety of shopfront styles and architectural periods.

2.3 The surrounding area contains:

- Retail premises
- Cafés and restaurants
- Financial and professional services
- Commercial offices
- Residential accommodation on upper floors

The High Street forms the commercial heart of St Neots and experiences high levels of pedestrian activity throughout the day.

2.4 The existing frontage is of relatively poor architectural quality, comprising a late twentieth-century aluminium framed shopfront with large areas of glazing and a centrally positioned entrance. While functional, the frontage makes only a limited positive contribution to the streetscape and no longer reflects contemporary expectations for high quality town centre commercial premises. The existing entrance arrangement and shopfront are shown on the submitted survey drawings and site photographs.

2.5 Internally the floor level is approximately 150mm higher than the adjacent pavement, resulting in an existing access arrangement which cannot readily provide fully inclusive access without alteration to the entrance configuration.

2.6 The existing building presents a relatively dated commercial frontage which lacks visual interest and provides only limited engagement with the public realm.

The existing shopfront comprises:

- large aluminium framed glazing panels;
- a centrally positioned entrance;
- limited articulation;
- relatively poor accessibility;
- no opportunity for independent occupation by separate commercial tenants.

2.7 **Flood Risk**

The site is in **Flood Zone 2**



## 2.8 **Site Photos**






## 3. Planning Policy Context

### 3.1 National Policy – NPPF

The proposals accord with the **National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF)**, in particular:

- **Section 7 – Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres**
- **Section 12 – Achieving Well-designed Place**

The proposals support the NPPF by:

- improving the quality of the built environment;
- encouraging continued occupation of commercial premises;
- improving accessibility;
- enhancing the appearance of the High Street; and
- supporting sustainable economic growth within an established town centre.

The scheme embodies the principles of good design by responding positively to local character while delivering a contemporary architectural solution that improves the usability and appearance of the building.

### 3.2 Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036

The proposals have been designed to accord with the objectives of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036, including in particular:

**Policy LP11 – Design Context**

Requires development to respond positively to local character and context.

The proposals retain the established building line while introducing a well-proportioned contemporary shopfront that enhances the existing streetscape.

**Policy LP12 – Design Implementation**

Requires development to demonstrate high quality design through appropriate detailing, scale, proportions and materials.

The proposals introduce a simple, elegant glazed frontage with carefully proportioned framing and entrance arrangements that reinforce the rhythm of neighbouring commercial premises.

**Policy LP13 – Placemaking**

Requires development to create attractive, safe and inclusive environments.

The proposal significantly improves accessibility through the provision of compliant entrance arrangements and enhanced visibility into the commercial units.

**Policy LP14 – Amenity**

The proposals have no adverse impact upon neighbouring properties in terms of overlooking, daylight, privacy, noise or disturbance.

**Policy LP16– Sustainable Travel**

The proposals encourage pedestrian activity within the town centre and improve accessibility for all users.

### 3.3 St Neots Neighbourhood Plan

The proposals also align with the objectives of the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan by:

- enhancing the quality of the town centre environment;
- supporting active commercial frontages;
- encouraging investment in existing buildings;
- improving accessibility;
- strengthening the vitality and attractiveness of the High Street.

The proposals represent an investment in the long-term future of an existing commercial property and contribute positively to the continuing regeneration of St Neots town centre.

## 4. Relevant Planning History

As table below:

**Replacement of existing ATM header signage to comply with new HSBC branding.**
5-7 High Street St Neots PE19 1DE
Ref. No: 20/00432/ADV | Received: Thu 27 Feb 2020 | Validated: Thu 27 Feb 2020 | Status: Approved

**Replacement of the existing external 'HSBC' signage with 'HSBC UK' equivalents to comply with current rebrand...**
Show more description
5-7 High Street St Neots PE19 1DE
Ref. No: 16/02636/ADV | Received: Mon 12 Dec 2016 | Validated: Tue 20 Dec 2016 | Status: Approved

**Condition information for 15/00020/FUL - C3**
5-7 High Street St Neots PE19 1DE
Ref. No: 15/80109/COND | Received: Fri 01 May 2015 | Validated: Fri 01 May 2015 | Status: Condition Reply

**Replacement ATM, part of the shopfront and new signage**
5-7 High Street St Neots PE19 1DE
Ref. No: 15/00020/FUL | Received: Wed 07 Jan 2015 | Validated: Wed 07 Jan 2015 | Status: Approved

**Main illuminated fascia sign, illuminated projecting sign, non-illuminated ATM sign**
5-7 High Street St Neots PE19 1DE
Ref. No: 15/00021/ADV | Received: Wed 07 Jan 2015 | Validated: Wed 07 Jan 2015 | Status: Approved

## 5. Heritage Assessment

### 5.1 Site and Heritage Context

The application site is located at **5–7 High Street, St Neots**, within the **St Neots Conservation Area**, designated for its special architectural and historic interest as the traditional commercial and civic centre of the town.

The High Street has developed over many centuries and is characterised by a rich mix of medieval street patterns, Georgian town houses, Victorian commercial buildings and later twentieth-century redevelopment. This varied architectural evolution contributes to the distinctive character of the Conservation Area, where historic buildings sit alongside more modern commercial development.

The application building occupies a prominent frontage within the principal shopping street. Whilst it contributes positively to the continuity of the commercial frontage and active town centre environment, the building itself is a relatively modern commercial structure and is not a statutory listed building.

The existing ground floor shopfront is a twentieth-century alteration of limited architectural merit comprising aluminium framing, extensive glazing and a centrally positioned entrance. It does not contain traditional shopfront detailing or surviving historic fabric and appears to have replaced an earlier frontage during the post-war redevelopment of the building. The existing frontage is illustrated on the submitted survey drawings and accompanying site photographs.

### 5.2 Significance of Heritage Significance

The heritage significance of the application site derives principally from:

- its location within the St Neots Conservation Area;
- its contribution to the continuous commercial frontage along High Street;
- its role in maintaining the active retail character of the historic town centre.

The existing shopfront itself possesses little individual architectural or historic significance. It is functional in appearance and makes only a neutral contribution to the wider character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The significance of the surrounding streetscape lies primarily in the collective quality of the historic buildings, the established building line, active ground floor uses and the traditional pattern of shopfronts rather than the architectural merit of this particular frontage.

### 5.3 Legislative and Planning Policy Context

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a statutory duty upon the Local Planning Authority to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area when determining planning applications.

The proposals have therefore been developed having regard to:

- the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), particularly Chapter 16 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*;
- Policies LP11, LP12, LP13 and LP34 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036;
- the design objectives of the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan;
- the statutory duty under Section 72(1) of the 1990 Act.

The design has sought not merely to preserve the Conservation Area but to enhance the quality of an existing frontage that currently contributes only neutrally to the streetscape.

### 5.4 Design Response

The proposed shopfront adopts a contemporary architectural language whilst respecting the established scale and proportions of neighbouring commercial premises.

The principal design objectives are to:

- improve the quality of the streetscape;
- strengthen the active commercial frontage;
- enhance accessibility;
- improve transparency;
- create three viable commercial units capable of supporting continued occupation.

The design deliberately avoids the introduction of imitation historic detailing. Instead, it adopts a simple, elegant and carefully proportioned composition that reflects good contemporary conservation practice by being honest in its architectural expression whilst remaining sympathetic to its historic surroundings.

The proposed full-height glazing increases visual connection between internal commercial activity and the public realm, reinforcing the vitality that has historically characterised St Neots High Street.

The new recessed entrance lobbies provide visual depth and articulation to the façade while allowing fully accessible internal ramps to be incorporated without introducing external structures that would clutter the pavement or detract from the appearance of the Conservation Area.

### 5.5 Impact on the Conservation Area

The proposals are confined entirely to alterations to the existing ground floor frontage. There will be:

- no increase in building height;
- no alteration to the upper floors;
- no changes to the roof;
- no alteration to the structural form of the building;

The development therefore preserves the established scale, rhythm and grain of the High Street whilst replacing an outdated frontage with a significantly higher quality architectural composition. The proposed subdivision of the premises into three commercial units also reinstates a finer grain of activity at street level, creating two independent entrances and increasing the level of pedestrian interaction along the High Street. The commercial unit on the 1st floor will use the existing access at the rear of the property. This responds positively to the historic pattern of multiple smaller commercial premises that traditionally characterised market towns.

### 5.6 Public Benefits

The proposals deliver a number of clear public benefits, including:

- enhancement of the visual quality of the High Street;
- improved architectural appearance within the Conservation Area;
- substantial improvements to inclusive access through fully compliant step-free entrances;
- creation of three flexible commercial units supporting town centre vitality;

- increased opportunities for independent businesses;
- continued investment in the historic commercial core of St Neots;
- improved natural surveillance through increased transparency;
- long-term sustainable reuse of an existing commercial building.

These benefits will contribute positively to the ongoing vitality and viability of St Neots town centre.

### 5.7 Heritage Conclusion

The existing shopfront is a modern intervention of limited architectural or historic significance that makes only a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area.

The proposed development replaces this dated frontage with a high-quality contemporary design that enhances the architectural appearance of the building whilst respecting the established scale, proportions and commercial character of High Street.

The development has been carefully designed to improve accessibility, strengthen the active frontage, support continued commercial occupation and reinforce the vitality of the town centre without causing harm to the significance of the Conservation Area or nearby heritage assets.

Accordingly, it is considered that the proposals preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area, satisfy the statutory duty under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and fully accord with the heritage objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

## 6. Design Approach

### 6.1 Design Principles

The proposed design seeks to transform the appearance of the building while respecting the scale and rhythm of neighbouring commercial premises.

The principal design objectives are:

- create an elegant contemporary shopfront;
- improve transparency;
- strengthen the relationship between internal commercial activity and the public realm;
- provide fully inclusive access;
- allow subdivision into three flexible commercial units;
- future-proof the building for long-term occupation.

The proposals retain the simple proportions of the existing building while significantly improving the quality of the ground floor elevation.

### 6.2 Proposed Shopfront

The existing frontage will be replaced with a new contemporary glazed shopfront extending across the full width of the building.

The new design introduces:

- full-height glazing;
- slim aluminium framing;

- increased transparency;
- improved visual balance;
- carefully proportioned structural elements;
- a contemporary appearance appropriate to a principal High Street location.

The extensive glazing provides a more active frontage and allows greater interaction between commercial activity and the public realm, increasing vitality throughout the day.

**6.3 Subdivision of Commercial Unit**

The existing single commercial unit will be subdivided into three independent commercial units.

This approach provides several planning benefits:

- increased flexibility of occupation;
- greater opportunity for smaller independent businesses;
- improved resilience of the commercial accommodation;
- enhanced long-term viability;
- increased economic activity within the town centre.

The subdivision does not alter the overall use of the premises but enables more efficient utilisation of the existing building.

**6.4 Entrance Design**

Two new fully glazed entrance doors will be introduced.
Each entrance has been carefully recessed to create entrance lobbies.
These recesses perform several important functions:

- provide weather protection;
- clearly define each commercial unit;
- improve legibility;
- allow accessibility ramps to be accommodated;
- create a welcoming entrance sequence.

The entrance arrangement provides a balanced composition across the frontage while improving accessibility and commercial identity.

**6.5 Materials**

The proposed materials comprise:

- powder-coated aluminium framing;
- full-height toughened glazing;
- glazed entrance doors;
- durable commercial quality finishes;
- high performance glazing.

The restrained material palette provides longevity while ensuring the new shopfront sits comfortably within the varied architectural character of High Street

**6.6. Design Conclusion**

Although contemporary in appearance, the proposed design respects the established rhythm and proportions of neighbouring commercial premises.

The shopfront has been deliberately designed with clean horizontal and vertical proportions which reinforce the existing building façade rather than compete with it.

The extensive glazing improves natural surveillance, creates a greater sense of openness and contributes positively to the vitality of the High Street.

The overall design avoids unnecessary architectural clutter, instead relying upon simple proportions, high quality materials and careful detailing to achieve a refined architectural appearance.

## 7. Townscape Impact

The proposals represent a significant visual enhancement over the existing frontage.
Key improvements include:

- replacement of a dated shopfront;
- improved architectural quality;
- increased transparency;
- stronger commercial presence;
- greater pedestrian interest;
- improved activity onto the street;
- enhanced vitality of the High Street.

The proposals are considered to make a positive contribution to the appearance of the town centre and reinforce the role of High Street as the principal commercial destination within St Neots.

## 8. Access

**Inclusive Design**

A fundamental design objective has been to provide genuinely inclusive access.

The existing floor level is approx. 150mm above the adjacent pavement, presenting a barrier to wheelchair users and others with reduced mobility.

Rather than relying upon external ramps that would project onto the public highway, the proposed design incorporates recessed entrance lobbies.

This solution enables compliant internal ramps to be formed while maintaining an attractive and uncluttered public realm.

The proposed arrangement provides:

- step-free access;
- improved wheelchair accessibility;
- enhanced access for parents with pushchairs;
- easier access for elderly users;
- compliance with the principles of inclusive design;
- improved circulation within each commercial unit.

The proposals therefore represent a substantial accessibility improvement over the existing building.

## 9. Sustainability

The proposals contribute towards sustainable development through:

- retention and reuse of the existing building;
- minimising embodied carbon;
- upgrading the shopfront to modern performance standards;
- creating flexible commercial accommodation capable of adapting to future occupiers;
- encouraging continued investment within the town centre;
- improving natural daylight to internal commercial spaces.

The reuse and enhancement of an existing building represent an inherently sustainable form of development consistent with national planning policy.

## 10. Conclusion

The proposed development represents a significant enhancement to an existing commercial building occupying a prominent position within St Neots High Street.
The scheme delivers:

- a high-quality contemporary shopfront;
- improved architectural appearance;
- enhanced commercial flexibility;
- three independent commercial units;
- greatly improved accessibility;
- a stronger relationship with the public realm;
- increased vitality within the town centre.

The proposals respond positively to the character of the surrounding streetscape while providing a modern and inclusive commercial environment capable of supporting the long-term success of the premises.

The development accords with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and the aspirations of the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan. It represents a sustainable investment in the continued regeneration of St Neots town centre and is therefore respectfully recommended for planning approval.

## APPENDIX 1

### List of Drawings

The drawings for the application are as follows:

| Drg Nos. | Rev | Scale @ A3 | Drawing title |
|---|---|---|---|
| P00 | | 1:500 | Block Plan |
| P01 | | 1:100 | EXISTING Ground Fl Plan |
| P02 | | 1:100 | EXISTING 1st Fl Plan |
| P03 | | 1:50 | EXISTING Shopfront |
| P04 | | 1:100 | PROPOSED Ground Fl Plan |
| P05 | | 1:100 | PROPOSED 1st Fl Plan |
| P06 | | 1:50 | PROPOSED Shopfront |

## APPENDIX 2

## FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

**Site Address: 5–7 High Street, St Neots, PE19 1DE**

**Proposal:** Proposed alterations to the existing commercial premises, including the subdivision of the existing Class E commercial unit to form three independent Class E commercial units (two at ground floor and one at first floor), together with replacement shopfronts, new recessed entrances and associated access improvements.

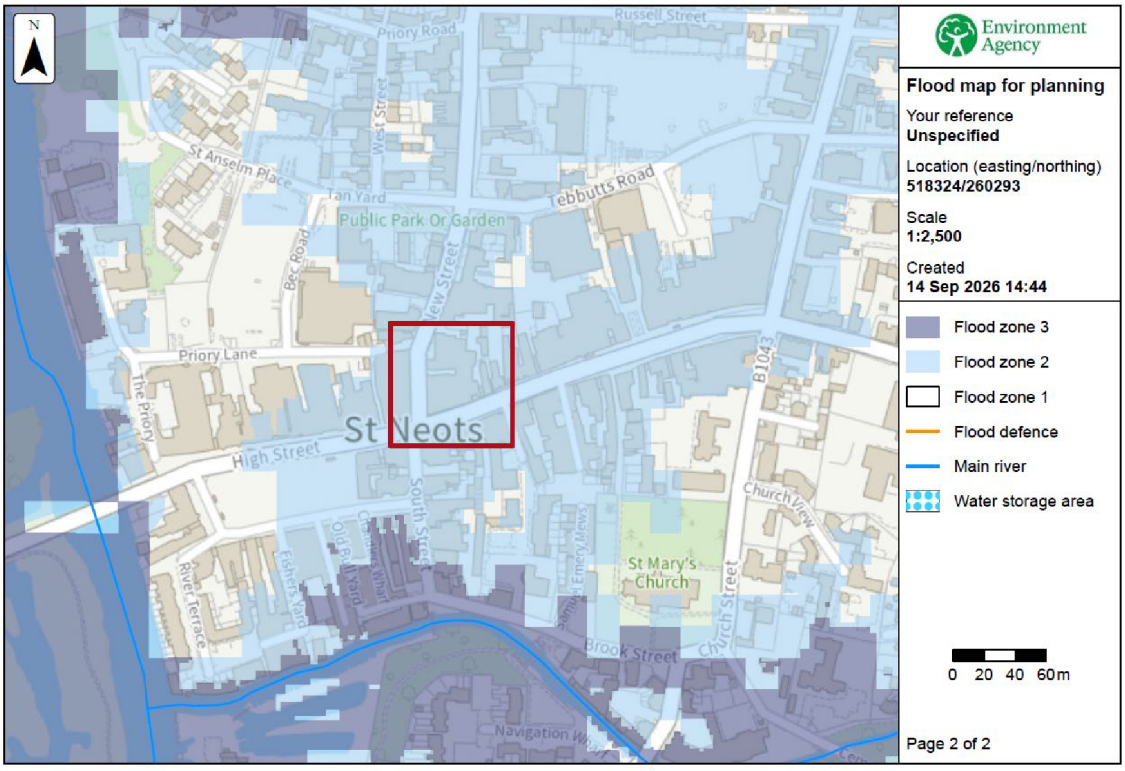
**Applicant:** Steki Investments Ltd

**Local Planning Authority:** Huntingdonshire District Council

### 1. Introduction & Site Context

This site-specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) statement accompanies the planning application for external shopfront alterations and access improvements at the above address.

According to the official Environment Agency 'Flood Map for Planning', the site is located within **Flood Zone 2**.




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## 2. Development Type & Classification

The proposed development consists exclusively of external modifications to an existing shopfront window and entrance to install compliant, step-free access ramps. Under national planning practice guidance, this proposal qualifies as a **Minor Development**. It involves:

- No change of use (the unit remains within active commercial Use Class E).
- No creation of new residential or overnight accommodation.
- No alterations to the internal structural layout or floor levels.

## 3. Assessment of Flood Risk & Mitigation

Because the proposal is strictly limited to the external frontage and accessibility improvements, the impact on local water systems is negligible:

- **Inherent Floor Level Protection:** The existing internal finished floor level (FFL) of the commercial unit sits structurally **higher than the external pavement level**. This elevated threshold serves as an inherent baseline protection against surface water and minor fluvial flooding. The proposed works will fully maintain this existing floor level.

- **Access Ramps:** The proposed external entrance ramps are designed purely to bridge the height difference between the lower street pavement and the elevated internal floor level. The footprint of these minor entry ramps is negligible and will not lead to any measurable loss of local flood plain storage or water displacement.

- **Footprint and Permeability:** The development will cause no operational increase to the building's main footprint. There will be no expansion of impermeable surfaces across the site.

- **Surface Water Runoff:** External drainage patterns remain entirely unchanged. The installation of the entry ramps will not interfere with existing street or building runoff management.
- **Resilience Measures:** Any new shopfront construction materials, structural framing, and ramp structures will incorporate modern, water-resilient materials where practical to ensure durability.

## 4. Conclusion

The proposed shopfront replacement and minor access ramps installation do not increase the risk of flooding on-site or elsewhere, nor do they alter the building's layout in a way that places occupants at risk. The proposal takes advantage of an existing elevated floor level to maintain a safe environment. It complies fully with local policy and national planning guidelines regarding minor developments in Flood Zone

APPENDIX 3

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN EXEMPTION STATEMENT

**Site Address: 5–7 High Street, St Neots, PE19 1DE**

**Proposal:** Proposed alterations to the existing commercial premises, including the subdivision of the existing Class E commercial unit to form three independent Class E commercial units (two at ground floor and one at first floor), together with replacement shopfronts, new recessed entrances and associated access improvements.

**Applicant:** Steki Investments Ltd

**Local Planning Authority:** Huntingdonshire District Council

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This Biodiversity Net Gain Exemption Statement has been prepared in support of the planning application for alterations to the existing commercial premises at **5–7 High Street, St Neots, PE19 1BU**.

1.2 The proposed development comprises:

- Alteration and complete replacement of the existing ground floor shopfront.
- Subdivision of the existing Class E commercial unit to form three independent Class E commercial units (two at ground floor and one at first floor).
- Installation of two new recessed glazed entrance lobbies.
- Formation of compliant external access ramps to provide level access from the public footway.
- Installation of new full-height glazed shopfronts.
- Associated alterations to glazing, framing and entrance doors.

1.3 The application site is an existing developed commercial property within St Neots town centre and the St Neots Conservation Area. The proposed works are principally confined to the existing building and hard-surfaced/developed areas.

## 2. Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain

2.1 Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as inserted by the Environment Act 2021, establishes the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain regime.

Certain categories of development are, however, exempt from the statutory Biodiversity Gain Condition.

2.2 Following changes which came into effect on **6 August 2026**, planning applications for development carried out on a site with an area **no larger than 0.2 hectares** are exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, provided that the development does not impact an onsite priority habitat.

2.3 The Government's Planning Practice Guidance further advises that where development is not householder development but is proposed on a site no larger than 0.2 hectares, the assessment should focus upon the **0.2 hectare exemption**, rather than the separate de minimis exemption.

**3. Site Area**

3.1 The application site, as defined by the red line boundary accompanying the planning application, has a total area of **less than 0.2 hectares (2,000m²)**.

The development therefore falls within the statutory exemption for development on sites no larger than 0.2 hectares.

3.2 The submitted location plan clearly identifies the extent of the application site and provides the Local Planning Authority with the necessary information to confirm that the site falls below the applicable threshold.

Government Planning Practice Guidance confirms that the submitted red-line location plan may be used as the starting point for assessing compliance with the 0.2 hectare exemption.

**4. Existing Habitat**

4.1 The application relates to an established commercial building and associated developed land within the built-up town centre of St Neots.
The proposed development is principally confined to the existing building envelope and existing hard-surfaced areas.

There is no identified onsite priority habitat that would be lost or degraded as a consequence of the proposed development.

4.2 The proposed works are predominantly alterations to the existing ground floor shopfront and entrance arrangements and therefore have no material impact upon existing habitat or biodiversity value.

Accordingly, the development satisfies the requirements of the exemption because:

- the application site is **no larger than 0.2 hectares**; and
- the development **does not impact an onsite priority habitat**.

**5. Biodiversity Considerations**

5.1 Although the development is exempt from the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement, biodiversity has nevertheless been considered as part of the development proposals.

Given the highly developed town-centre character of the site and the limited nature of the external works, there are very limited opportunities for meaningful habitat creation within the application boundary.

5.2 The development does not involve the removal of trees, hedgerows or other significant vegetation and does not result in the loss of identifiable habitat.

The proposed development therefore has a negligible effect upon the existing ecological characteristics of the site.

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 The proposed development at **5–7 High Street, St Neots** qualifies for the statutory exemption from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain applicable to development on sites no larger than **0.2 hectares**.

6.2 The application site:

- has a red-line site area no larger than 0.2 hectares;
- comprises an existing developed commercial property within St Neots town centre;
- contains no identified onsite priority habitat affected by the development; and
- is subject principally to alterations to the existing building and shopfront.

6.3 Accordingly, the statutory Biodiversity Gain Condition does **not apply** to the proposed development and there is therefore no requirement to submit a Statutory Biodiversity Metric or Biodiversity Gain Plan in association with the application.

# APPENDIX 4

## PLANNING STATEMENT

### 1.1 Principle of Development

The application relates to an existing commercial property situated within the established town centre of St Neots.

The proposed development involves the replacement of the existing ground floor shopfront, the subdivision of the existing commercial accommodation into three smaller independent units, and the provision of two new glazed entrances incorporating recessed lobbies to improve accessibility.

The premises will retain their existing Class E commercial use, and no change of use is proposed as part of the application.

The subdivision is intended to provide smaller, more flexible commercial accommodation that better responds to local market demand, particularly from smaller and independent businesses seeking premises within the town centre.

The proposals represent an appropriate and sustainable form of investment in an existing commercial property, supporting the continued occupation and vitality of St Neots High Street.

### 1.2 National Planning Policy Framework

The proposals have been considered against the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), particularly those relating to:

- Supporting a prosperous economy and the vitality of town centres.
- Achieving well-designed and inclusive places.
- Making effective use of existing buildings.
- Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

The development supports these objectives through the refurbishment and continued commercial use of an existing town centre building, improving its appearance, accessibility and suitability for future occupiers.

The proposals will contribute positively to the vitality and viability of St Neots High Street while preserving and enhancing the character of the surrounding Conservation Area.

### 1.3 Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036

The adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 provides the principal local planning policy framework against which the proposals are assessed.

**Policy LP7 – Spatial Planning Areas**
St Neots forms part of an identified Spatial Planning Area where development is directed towards sustainable locations with access to existing services, facilities and infrastructure.

The proposals make effective use of an existing commercial property within the established town centre and support the continued economic function of this sustainable location.

**Policy LP11 – Design Context**
The policy requires development to respond positively to its context and draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings.

The proposed shopfront has been designed to respect the scale, proportions and established commercial character of the High Street, while introducing a contemporary architectural treatment that enhances the existing frontage.

**Policy LP12 – Design Implementation**
The proposals adopt a coherent and carefully considered design approach, incorporating high-quality glazing, restrained framing and recessed entrances.

The design improves the appearance and functionality of the building without introducing unnecessary architectural detailing or visual clutter.

**Policy LP13 – Placemaking**
The development will contribute positively to the public realm through improved transparency, active commercial frontages and more welcoming entrances.

The provision of three independent commercial units will also help reinforce the finer grain and variety of commercial activity characteristic of traditional market town centres.

**Policy LP14 – Amenity**
The proposed works are confined principally to alterations to the existing ground floor commercial frontage.

The development will not result in any material adverse impact upon neighbouring occupiers in terms of overlooking, privacy, daylight or outlook.

**Policy LP16 – Sustainable Travel**
The site is situated within the principal shopping area of St Neots, readily accessible by walking, cycling and public transport.

The proposals improve pedestrian accessibility through the introduction of recessed entrance lobbies and internal access ramps, without the need for external ramps projecting into the public footway.

**Policy LP21 – Town Centre Vitality and Viability**
The proposals support the continued commercial use and attractiveness of St Neots town centre.

The creation of three smaller commercial units provides greater flexibility for future occupation, potentially accommodating a wider range of businesses and responding to changing commercial requirements.

The improved shopfront design will also enhance the attractiveness of the premises and contribute to the quality of the shopping environment.

**Policy LP34 – Heritage Assets and their Settings**
The site lies within the St Neots Conservation Area.

The proposals have been carefully considered in relation to the significance of the Conservation Area and the character of the historic High Street.

The existing shopfront is of limited architectural merit. Its replacement with a carefully proportioned contemporary frontage will improve the appearance of the building while respecting the established scale and commercial character of the surrounding streetscape.

The proposals are therefore considered to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

**5.4 St Neots Neighbourhood Plan**
The St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2014–2029 recognises the importance of maintaining a vibrant and attractive town centre and encouraging a diverse range of commercial uses.

The proposals respond positively to these objectives by:

- Improving the architectural appearance of an existing High Street property.
- Creating smaller commercial units that respond to local market needs.
- Encouraging opportunities for independent businesses.
- Improving accessibility for all users.
- Supporting the continued vitality and economic resilience of the town centre.

The development will contribute positively to the character and attractiveness of the High Street while supporting its established commercial function.

**1.5 Conservation Area and Heritage Considerations**
The application site lies within the St Neots Conservation Area, where particular importance is placed upon preserving and enhancing the historic character and appearance of the town centre.

The proposals have been developed having regard to Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The existing shopfront comprises modern glazing and framing of limited architectural or historic significance.

The proposed replacement shopfront adopts a restrained contemporary design that respects the proportions and established commercial character of the building and its surroundings.

The introduction of two recessed entrances provides additional depth and articulation to the frontage while improving accessibility without introducing external structures or obstructions within the public realm.

The proposals will preserve the existing building form and established street frontage while enhancing the visual quality of the ground floor elevation.

The heritage impact of the proposals is considered in greater detail within the Heritage Assessment section of this Design and Access Statement.

**1.6 Accessibility and Inclusive Design**
An important objective of the proposals is to address the existing difference in level between the public pavement and the internal ground floor accommodation.

The new shopfront incorporates two recessed entrance lobbies to accommodate internal access ramps, providing improved step-free access to each commercial unit.

This arrangement avoids the need for external ramps or structures projecting onto the public highway and provides a more inclusive and welcoming entrance arrangement.

The proposals therefore deliver a significant accessibility improvement while maintaining the quality and unobstructed character of the public realm.

**1.7 Economic and Town Centre Benefits**

The subdivision of the existing commercial premises into three smaller units responds to the changing requirements of the local commercial market.

Smaller premises can provide more manageable and flexible accommodation for independent retailers, service providers and other businesses operating within Use Class E.

The proposed development will:

- Improve the flexibility and marketability of the existing commercial accommodation.
- Encourage continued occupation and investment.
- Provide opportunities for a wider range of local businesses.
- Improve the appearance and attractiveness of the High Street.
- Support the long-term vitality and viability of St Neots town centre.

The development represents a positive investment in the existing building stock without requiring additional land or new development outside the established town centre.

**3.8 Planning Conclusion**
The proposed development represents an appropriate and sustainable enhancement to an existing commercial property within St Neots town centre.

The proposals will improve the architectural appearance of the building, provide more flexible commercial accommodation, enhance inclusive access and make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area.

The development supports the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan.

It is therefore considered acceptable in planning terms, and planning permission is respectfully sought.