DAS and Heritage Statement

25 - 27 Market Square St Neots

RIBA Chartered Practice

Architects Registration Board

Contents

1. Introduction 1
2. Site Context 1
3. Site History 1
4. Flood 2
5. Use 2
6. Layout 3
7. Scale 3
8. Amount 3
9. Access 3
10. Design and Appearance 4
11. Heritage Statement 5
12. Conclusion 7

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Figure 1 Front Image

1. Introduction

1.1. Cameron Bosque Brookes Architects have been appointed to submit a change of use application to convert a former retail unit into a youth centre.

2. Site Context

2.1. Situated prominently on St Neots High Street right across from the Market Square, the former M&CO property aligns naturally with the established street frontage and architectural rhythm of the surrounding town centre.

2.2. Both the High Street and Market Square are designated within the St Neots Conservation Area, an area defined by a blend of historic listed and unlisted structures. Directly facing the site, the neighbouring architecture largely stems from the 18th and 19th centuries. These properties are typically two- to three-storey red or buff brick buildings featured alongside Georgian sash windows, painted timberwork, and slate or tile roofs.

2.3. The surrounding area accommodates a diverse mix of uses, including retail outlets with updated storefronts, local cafés, restaurants, and supermarkets, highlighting its function as the town's primary social and commercial core. At the same time, several vacant properties reflect the challenges faced in an increasingly digital marketplace.

2.4. Logistically, the location offers outstanding connectivity. It is directly served by multiple local bus services (routes 61, 66, C2, 150, 18, 18A, 67, and 65) and sits within a brief 4- to 8-minute cycle journey of key surrounding residential areas and schools, including Eynesbury, Eaton Socon, Eaton Ford, and Loves Farm.

3. Site History

3.1. The planning portal holds records for 9 applications made over a period of just under 50 years. None of these historical applications negatively impact or constrain the current proposal.

- 1977 EXTENSION Ref. No: 77/00132/FUL | Status: Permission
- 1981 NEW ENTRANCE Ref. No: 81/01037/FUL | Status: Permission
- 1981 BOTTLE STORE Ref. No: 81/01581/FUL | Status: Permission
- 1990 Refurbishment & extension to shop Ref. No: 90/01832/FUL | Status: Permission
- 1992 Extensions for retail and office purposes. Ref. No: 92/00021/FUL | Status: Permission
- 2003 Alterations to front and rear shopfronts and installation of air conditioning condenser units Ref. No: 0300277FUL | Status: Permission
- 2003 Display of illuminated fascia and projecting signs 2003 Ref. No: 0300278ADV | Status: Consent
- 2025 Reinstating two no. retail units. Ref. No: 24/02021/FUL | Status: Permission
- 2025 Variation of condition 4 (use) of 24/02021/FUL to allow any use within Use Class E(a) and E(b) Ref. No: 25/01383/S73 | Status: Permission

4. Flood

4.1. The site is located within Flood Zone 2 and lies adjacent to an area of surface water flood risk. However, the proposal relates to an existing structure within the town centre. No changes are proposed to existing floor levels, and no works will be undertaken that increase the risk of flooding (in accordance with NPPF flood risk requirements and Local Plan Policy LP 15).

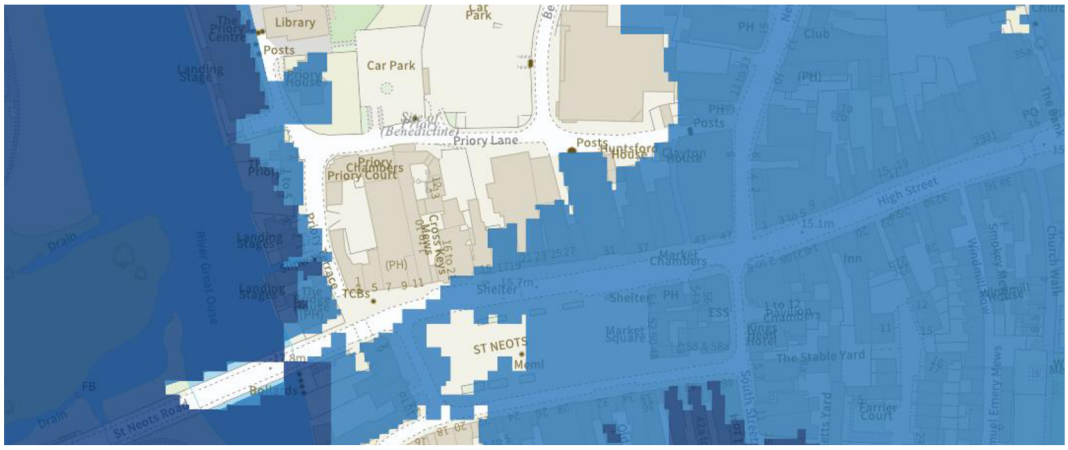

Figure 3 Flood map extract

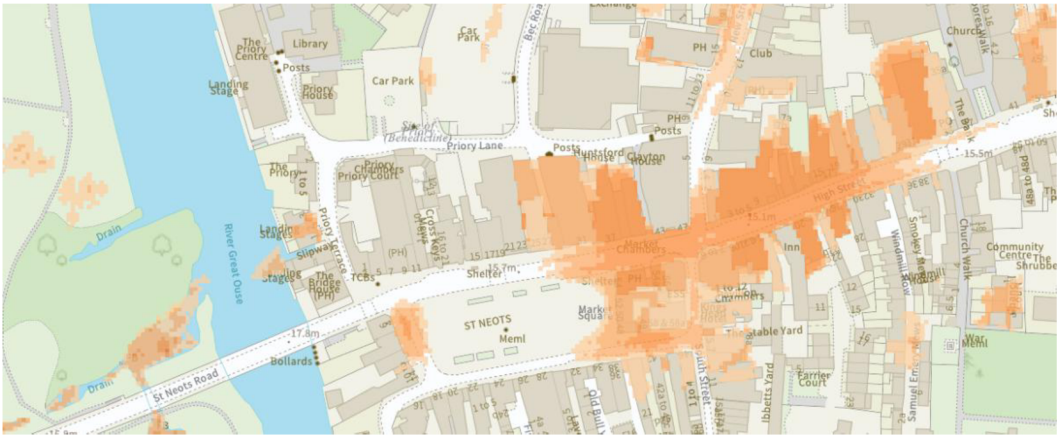

Figure 2 Surface water flooding map extract

5. Use

5.1. The proposed change of use seeks to establish a youth centre that preserves and enhances the character of the St Neots Conservation Area while providing significant social benefits as well as compliance with Class E to Local Community Use (Class F2/Sui Generis as applicable) and Policy LP 6 / LP 32 (Community Facilities) of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

5.2. Locating the facility centrally gives local youth a dedicated, purposeful space, directly addressing antisocial behaviour. Consultations with council youth leaders and Huntingdonshire Business Against Crime (HBAC) highlighted specific local issues, such as boredom and "roof running." The centre will serve as a hub for Cambridgeshire County Council's youth and diversion teams, supporting early intervention through structured, supervised activities.

5.3. Operating six days per week across daytime and early evening hours, the centre ensures consistent town-centre activity. This boosts footfall, enhances natural surveillance, and improves safety perceptions around Market Square, confirming the site's suitability for serving young people across St Neots.

5.4. The site also strengthens collaboration between youth services, PCSOs, and local traders—building on joint initiatives like retailer ID-challenge campaigns. Its prominent position overlooking Market Square maximizes visibility and community integration, enabling young people to participate in local cultural, music, and craft events.

5.5. Achieving these outcomes requires a permanent, recognizable base. A dedicated centre ensures staffing continuity, robust safeguarding, and sustained partnership work—benefits that intermittent use of shared venues cannot deliver in such a high-profile location.

6. Layout

6.1. Internally, the floorplate will be reconfigured to deliver safe, versatile spaces designed for education, activities, and community interaction. While the exterior elevation presents as a two-storey structure, the upper floor level was removed historically; as such, no external modifications are proposed to the roof, upper facade, or existing Georgian sash windows.

6.2. Design priorities are centered entirely on optimizing the internal spatial layout and integrating enhanced acoustic controls to ensure sound is effectively contained without impacting adjacent retail operations.

7. Scale

7.1. Formerly a single larger unit, the building was reinstated as two individual retail units in 2025. The current proposal involves no alterations to the building's overall height, scale, or external massing.

8. Amount

8.1. The existing building has an internal footprint of 238m^2 distributed over a single floor.

8.2. As noted in Section 6, although evidence indicates a second floor was previously present, the proposed change of use proposes internal alterations only. The scheme retains the building's current single-floor footprint to accommodate the new community facility

9. Access

9.1. Although the building can only be accessed from the front, the site benefits from excellent servicing and access arrangements. The Waitrose car park and Priory Lane to the rear, provide a safe drop-off point without adding congestion to the High Street. Cycle parking is available nearby, and pedestrian access via the Cross Keys walkway offers a direct, safe, and well-used route between the town centre and Market Square. Priory car park also allows nearby parking for council youth workers.

9.2. These safe, convenient access routes support the building's operation as a six-day-a-week youth facility—enabling both targeted daytime services and drop-in community access. By fully leveraging existing town centre parking facilities and road infrastructure, the site accommodates routine operations without burdening the surrounding highway network.

9.3. The single storey nature and town centre locality also ensure inclusive access.

10. Design and Appearance



Figure 5 Visual showing a vision for the new frontage



Figure 4 Existing frontage

10.1. The scheme adopts a deliberately minimal approach to physical interventions. The existing large shopfront will be retained and refurbished, preserving a transparent, inviting, and active street frontage facing the Market Square.

10.2. The internal layout will be reconfigured to create secure, adaptable environments tailored for education, activities, and social engagement.

10.3. While the exterior facade gives the impression of a two-storey structure, no changes are proposed for the roof structure, upper building elevations, or the existing Georgian sash windows. Instead, design efforts are directed entirely toward optimizing the interior configuration and incorporating robust acoustic insulation.

11. Heritage Statement

11.1. This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared to support the planning application in accordance with Chapter 20 (Policies HE4 and HE5) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2026). In line with national requirements, this assessment describes the significance of any heritage assets affected by the proposal—including any contribution made by their setting—to a level of detail proportionate to their importance and sufficient to evaluate the potential impact of the scheme.

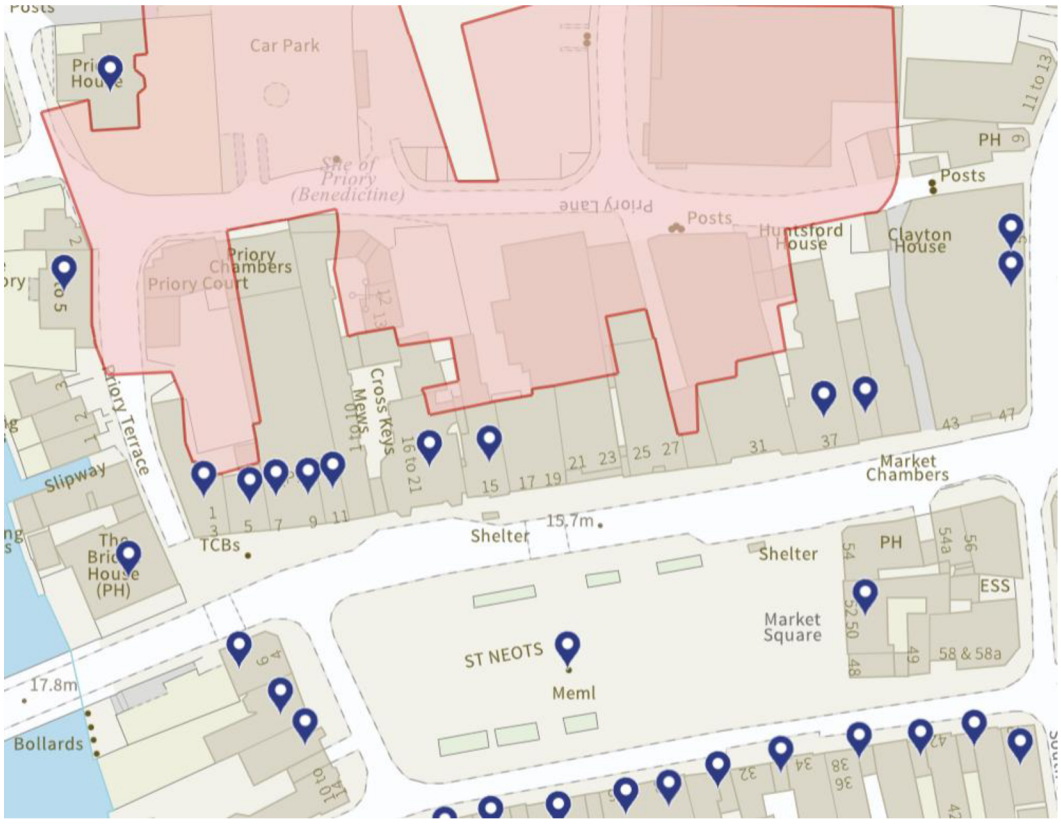

Figure 6 Listed buildings adjacent to the application site (indicated with blue markers); the red shaded area indicates the boundary of an adjacent Scheduled Monument.

11.2. This assessment provides an appraisal of the affected heritage assets in accordance with NPPF 2026 policies, the *St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment*, and Historic England Advice Note 12 (*Statements of Heritage Significance*).

11.3. As shown in Figure 6, while there are several designated heritage assets within the wider area, none will be affected by the proposed works due to spatial separation and the localized nature of the interventions.

11.4. In accordance with the NPPF 2026 Glossary, 'significance' is defined as:

> *"The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting."*

11.5. National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) defines these interests as follows:

- **Archaeological interest:** Present if an asset holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation.
- **Architectural and artistic interest:** Pertains to design, craftsmanship, decoration, and overall aesthetic value. Architectural interest relates to the art/science of building design; artistic interest reflects human creative skill.
- **Historic interest:** Illustrates past lives, events, or collective community identity, providing a material record of national or local history.

11.6. **Evaluation of Impact (NPPF Policy HE5 & Policy HE6):** In accordance with **NPPF Policy HE5**, the potential impact of the proposed works on the significance of nearby designated heritage assets and the St Neots Conservation Area has been categorized as follows:

- **Shopfront & Exterior Interventions:** The existing large shopfront will be retained and sensitively refurbished, maintaining an active, transparent, and welcoming frontage onto Market Square. No changes are proposed to the roof structure, upper elevations, or historic Georgian sash windows. This aspect results in **no effect** on the external significance of the setting or surrounding assets.
- **Internal Refurbishment & Re-use:** Re-occupying an empty town-centre unit to establish a permanent youth hub brings positive social infrastructure, daily footfall, and enhanced natural surveillance to Market Square. In line with **Policy HE4 and Policy HE6**, this delivers a **positive effect** by enhancing the vitality and active character of the St Neots Conservation Area while securing the long-term, sustainable reuse of a commercial building.

11.7. Overall, the proposal results in **no harm** to the St Neots Conservation Area, the adjacent Scheduled Monument, or the setting of nearby Grade II listed buildings, and warrants full support under Policy HE6.

12. Conclusion

12.1. Because the scheme focuses predominantly on sensitive internal refurbishment, it causes no harm to the historic significance of the St Neots Conservation Area or the setting of surrounding listed assets. The development fully safeguards the building's historic fabric while generating substantial public and social value.

12.2. The conversion of a vacant commercial unit into a permanent, vibrant youth hub will deliver clear positive effects for the town centre—increasing daytime footfall, enhancing natural surveillance around Market Square, and encouraging local young people into constructive community engagement.

12.3. The proposal accords fully with national heritage and design policies set out in Chapter 20 (Policies HE4, HE5, and HE6) of the NPPF 2026, as well as Policies LP 6, LP 14, and LP 34 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. It represents a highly sustainable, positive, and socially valuable addition to St Neots town centre.