FIGMENT ARCHITECTURE

FROM IMAGINATION TO REALITY

Heritage Statement and Design & Access Statement

First Floor Office (Use Class E) to 2 No. Residential Flats (Use Class C3)

Prepared By:

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On Behalf of:

40 High Street, St Neots, PE19 1JA

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Heritage Justification and Design & Access Statement has been prepared by Figment Architecture Ltd on behalf of Mr and Mrs Evans in support of applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for the proposed change of use of the first-floor office accommodation at 40 High Street, St Neots, from commercial use (Use Class E) to 2 no. self-contained residential flats (Use Class C3).

1.2 The statement explains the planning, design, access and heritage principles underpinning the proposal and responds to the advice provided by Huntingdonshire District Council under pre-application reference 26/70016/PREAPP.

2.0 Site and Context

2.1 The application site is located at 40 High Street, St Neots, within the St Neots Conservation Area. The building is Grade II listed and forms part of the established historic High Street frontage.

2.2 The ground floor is occupied by a café, with former office accommodation at first-floor level. The proposal relates solely to the conversion of the first-floor accommodation, with the existing ground-floor commercial use retained.

2.3 Residential accommodation above commercial premises is a common and well-established feature within the town centre and is compatible with the character and use of historic High Street buildings.

2.4 Existing access is provided from the side passage adjoining the High Street frontage. This allows the residential accommodation to be accessed discreetly without alteration to the principal shopfront or High Street elevation.

3.0 Significance of Heritage Asset

3.1 The building is Grade II listed and lies within the St Neots Conservation Area. Its significance is derived from its historic High Street location, traditional external appearance, established roof form, surviving window and door openings, shopfront, architectural detailing and contribution to the character and appearance of the town centre.

3.2 The first-floor accommodation has previously been adapted for office use and includes a number of lightweight internal partitions and modern finishes associated with that use.

3.3 These later office partitions are understood to be non-structural additions and do not form part of the principal historic structure or significant historic plan form of the listed building.

3.4 The principal external walls, structural walls, roof form, existing openings and surviving architectural features make the greatest contribution to the significance of the building and will be retained.

4.0 Heritage Impact

4.1 The proposed conversion has been designed to conserve the architectural and historic significance of the Grade II listed building.

4.2 Internal alterations are limited primarily to the removal of lightweight, non-structural partitions associated with the former office layout. No significant historic or structural walls are proposed for removal.

4.3 The principal historic fabric, external walls, roof form, existing window and door openings and surviving architectural features will be retained.

4.4 New partitions will be lightweight and positioned around the existing fabric to minimise intervention and maintain the legibility of the original building. The works will be designed to be reversible where reasonably practicable.

4.5 No alterations are proposed to the external windows, doors or existing external openings. The proposed layouts have been developed around the existing fenestration and access arrangements, preserving the established external appearance of the listed building.

4.6 Where existing windows are located within critical locations for the purposes of Building Regulations Part K, protection against impact and the risk of falling will be provided internally through additional guarding. This will avoid the need to replace or materially alter the existing windows.

4.7 Any fire-resisting, acoustic or thermal upgrading required to facilitate the residential use will be carefully detailed to minimise physical and visual impact on the historic fabric.

4.8 The proposal is therefore considered to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and the character and appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area.

5.0 Planning Rationale

5.1 The proposed conversion represents the appropriate and sustainable re-use of underutilised first-floor office accommodation in a highly accessible town-centre location.

5.2 The proposal retains the existing commercial use at ground-floor level and introduces residential accommodation above, consistent with the established pattern of development along the High Street.

5.3 The principle of converting the first-floor office accommodation to residential use was supported through the pre-application process, subject to detailed consideration of design, heritage, amenity, flood risk and associated technical matters.

5.4 The proposal will:

- Make efficient use of an existing building;
- Provide additional housing within a sustainable town-centre location;
- Support the continued vitality of the High Street;
- Retain the ground-floor commercial use; and
- Secure an appropriate long-term use for the upper floors of the listed building.

6.0 Amount and Use

6.1 The proposal comprises the conversion of the existing first-floor office accommodation to:

- 1 no. one-bedroom, two-person flat of approximately 50 sqm; and
- 1 no. one-bedroom, two-person flat of approximately 66 sqm.

6.2 Both dwellings meet or exceed the nationally described space standard for one-bedroom, two-person accommodation.

6.3 The existing café use at ground-floor level will remain unchanged.

7.0 Layout and design

7.1 The proposed layout provides 2 no. self-contained one-bedroom flats at first-floor level.

7.2 The larger flat, measuring approximately 60 sqm, will be accessed via the existing external staircase. The smaller flat, measuring approximately 57.5 sqm, will be accessed via the existing internal staircase.

7.3 Each flat will contain a living, kitchen and dining area, one bedroom, bathroom and suitable internal storage.

7.4 The layouts have been designed around the existing structural walls, historic fabric, window openings and access arrangements.

7.5 The only walls proposed for removal are lightweight, non-structural partitions associated with the former office layout. No wholesale removal of historic walls is proposed.

7.6 New lightweight partitions will be introduced only where required to form the residential accommodation and will be positioned to minimise intervention in the existing fabric.

7.7 Habitable rooms have been arranged to benefit from the existing windows and available natural daylight.

7.8 No external windows or doors are proposed to be removed, replaced or altered as part of the application.

7.9 Any safety improvements required to existing windows will be provided internally through additional guarding where necessary, without affecting the external elevations or historic window fabric.

7.10 No material alterations are proposed to the external elevations. The existing roof form, windows, doors, openings and architectural detailing will be retained.

8.0 Internal Alterations and Building Fabric

8.1 The proposed internal works comprise:

- removal of later lightweight office partitions;
- construction of new lightweight partitions;
- fire compartmentation where required;
- acoustic upgrading between the flats and adjoining uses;
- thermal upgrading where appropriate; and
- associated building-services installations.

8.2 No significant historic structural walls are proposed for removal.

8.3 Any works affecting existing fabric will be kept to the minimum necessary and detailed to avoid unnecessary loss or concealment of significant historic features.

8.4 New interventions will, where reasonably practicable, be reversible and identifiable as modern additions.

8.5 Fire, acoustic and thermal upgrading works will be developed as part of the Building Regulations design and coordinated to minimise impact on the listed fabric.

8.6 Where existing glazing is located within a critical location, or where the sill height presents a potential risk of falling, internally mounted guarding will be provided where required to satisfy the functional requirements of Building Regulations Part K.

8.7 The guarding will be designed to minimise visual and physical impact and, where reasonably practicable, avoid irreversible alteration to the existing window frames, reveals and surrounding historic fabric.

8.8 Detailed construction information relating to fire compartmentation, acoustic attenuation, insulation and any works within the roof space will accompany or be conditioned through the relevant consent and Building Regulations process.

9.0 Access

9.1 The site occupies a highly accessible town-centre location within walking distance of shops, services, employment opportunities, public transport and public open space.

9.2 The two flats will use the existing access arrangements:

- one flat will be accessed via the existing internal staircase; and
- one flat will be accessed via the existing external staircase from the side passage.

9.3 No alterations are proposed to the existing external entrance doors.

9.4 Due to the first-floor location and the constraints of the listed building, step-free access cannot reasonably be provided without substantial intervention in the historic fabric.

9.5 The internal layouts will nevertheless be designed to provide practical and usable accommodation, subject to the constraints of the existing listed building.

9.6 The requirements of Building Regulations Part M will be considered at the Building Regulations stage, with any departures arising from the existing building constraints appropriately assessed and justified.

10.0 Residential Amenity

10.1 Both flats provide accommodation meeting the nationally described space standards for one-bedroom, two-person dwellings.

10.2 Habitable rooms are served by existing external windows, providing natural light, outlook and ventilation.

10.3 Although no private external amenity space is available, the property occupies a sustainable town-centre location close to Riverside Park and other public open spaces.

10.4 Appropriate acoustic separation will be provided between the flats, the ground-floor café and neighbouring uses as part of the detailed Building Regulations design.

10.5 The existing café use will be considered in the specification of floor, wall and ceiling upgrades to protect the amenity of future occupants from noise and other potential disturbance.

11.0 Parking, Cycle and Refuse Storage

11.1 No on-site vehicle parking is available, as the ownership is limited to the building footprint with no associated external land.

11.2 The absence of parking is considered acceptable in view of the highly sustainable town-centre location and the availability of shops, services and public transport within walking distance.

11.3 Secure cycle storage will be provided within the building or within an appropriate area accessed from the side passage, as shown on the accompanying drawings.

11.4 Refuse and recycling storage will be provided in a suitable and accessible location without detriment to the character or appearance of the listed building or Conservation Area.

11.5 The required wheeled-bin unilateral undertaking will be completed in accordance with the Council's requirements.

12.0 Flood Risk

12.1 The application site lies within Flood Zone 2.

12.2 A site-specific Flood Risk Assessment accompanies the application and considers the proposed change of use and the vulnerability of the future occupants.

12.3 The proposal relates to existing first-floor accommodation and does not create additional built footprint or reduce flood-storage capacity.

12.4 Any mitigation measures identified within the Flood Risk Assessment will be incorporated into the development.

12.5 The council confirmed that a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment is required for the formal application.

13.0 Biodiversity

13.1 The proposal consists of an internal change of use within an existing building and does not involve the loss of habitat, additional building footprint or external works affecting biodiversity.

13.2 The development falls below the threshold for mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and is not expected to result in harm to biodiversity or geodiversity.

14.0 Water Efficiency

14.1 The proposed dwellings will be designed to comply with the optional water-efficiency requirement of 110 litres per person per day where required by local planning policy.

14.2 Compliance will be demonstrated through the Building Regulations submission.

15.0 Conclusion

15.1 The proposal represents the appropriate and sustainable re-use of underutilised first-floor office accommodation within a highly accessible town-centre location.

15.2 It provides 2 no. well-proportioned one-bedroom, two-person flats while retaining the existing ground-floor café and commercial use.

15.3 The proposed layouts have been designed around the existing historic fabric. The removal of walls is limited to later lightweight office partitions, with the

principal structural walls, external form and significant architectural features retained.

15.4 No alterations are proposed to the existing external windows, doors or openings. Any necessary protection against impact or falling will be provided internally, allowing Building Regulations requirements to be addressed without altering the external appearance or significant historic fabric.

15.5 The scheme will therefore preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building and the character and appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area.

15.6 The proposal accords with the relevant national and local planning policies and responds positively to the matters raised during the pre-application process. It is therefore considered suitable for approval.