HERITAGE, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT:

ASSEMBLY HOUSE, 57 HIGH STREET, ST NEOTS, HUNTINGDONSHIRE PE19 1BN



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Proposal number: 2500 - 001

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Statement accompanies the application for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent to carry out minor alterations to Assembly House which is a Grade II listed building. These works are carried out by the Landlord and there is a separate application, submitted by the new tenant Pure Gym, for the ground floor of the building. Assembly House has been substantially altered over the years when it was adapted to be a department store for Beales and before that the Co-op. It has lost most of its special interest internally and has been vacant for a number of years. It is a prominent building on the high street and its re-use will be welcomed to bring back activity to the building and in turn investment.

This application should be read in conjunction with the submitted drawings by Naylors Gavin Black.

Purpose of this Statement

The purpose of the Heritage Statement is to set out the significance of the heritage assets and to assess the impact of the submitted proposal against the significance of the heritage assets in accordance with Section 16 of the NPPF. It should be proportionate to the change proposed, but this building has had an important historic role within the town so there is more information below than necessary.

Structure of this Statement

This Statement sets out the description of the site, a summary of the legislative and policy framework, followed by an assessment of significance. The assessment then sets out the impact of the proposal on that significance, including whether the proposal would sustain, enhance or harm significance.

Description of the Proposed Works

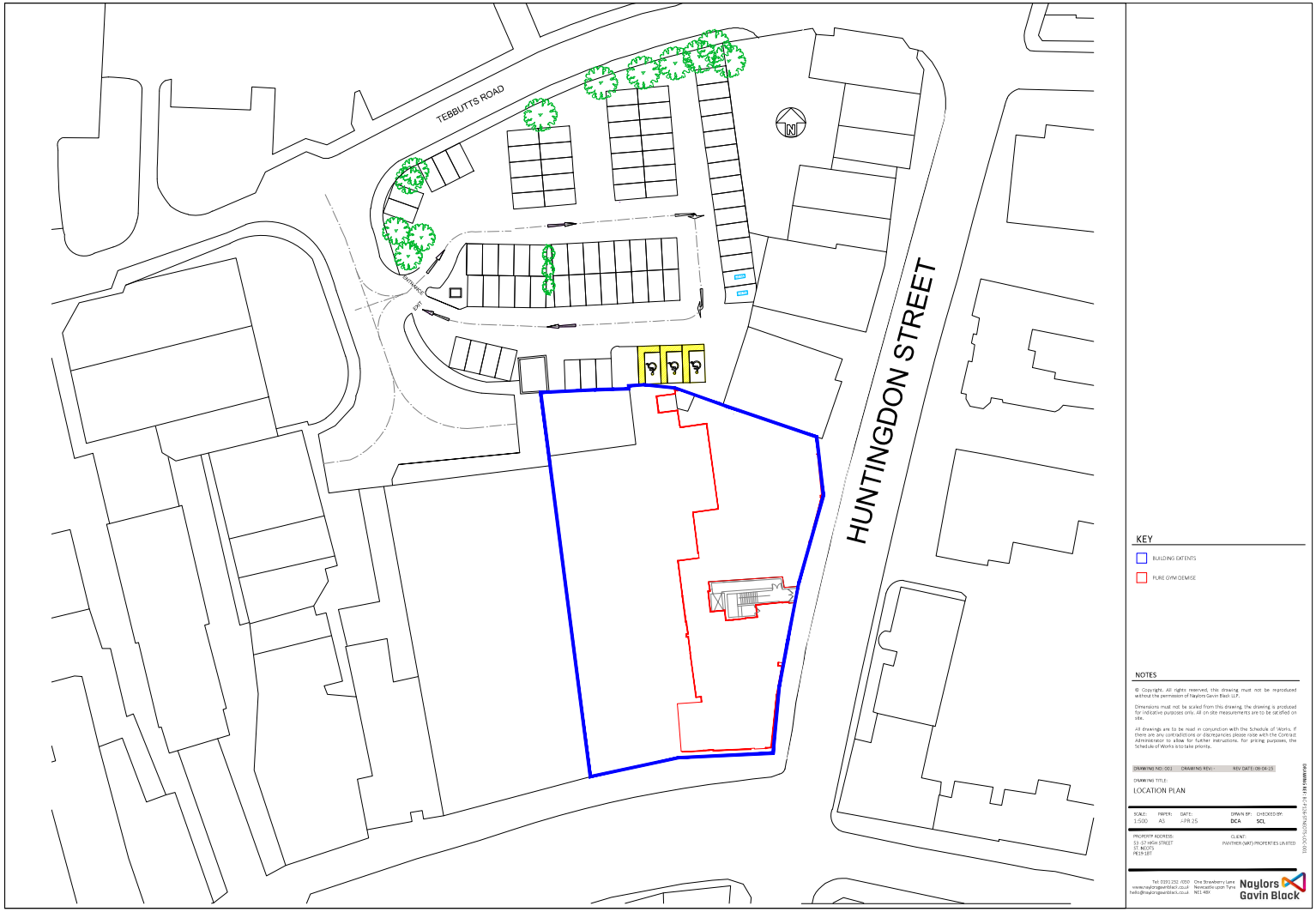
The proposed works seek planning permission and listed building consent for:

- 1 no. new fire door fitted to new lobby set back with a structural opening of 850mm in the the position of the existing. To be compliant with building regulations as an escape door to replace the existing door. New door to match the existing in appearance.
- Secondary glazing to the modern shop floor windows on the ground floor south elevation to the existing single glazed units.
- Like for like repair to the existing timber facade of the shopfront, filling fixed holes, surface repairs and redecorating to match the existing in white.

Site Location

The town of St Neots is located within the district of Huntingdonshire. The building is located on the edge of the shopping area along the main high street to the town.

Assembly House is located on the cross roads and the corner of High Street and Huntingdon Street to the east of the town centre.



2. PLANNING CONTEXT

This section briefly sets out the planning context for this application in respect of the historic environment. The Government has published guidance notes to support Local Planning Authorities in making decisions on applications within the historic environment and these are summarised below.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 66 of the 1990 Act sets out how Local Planning Authorities should deal with applications to listed buildings. It states that; '*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.*' Section 72 of the same 1990 Act affords protection to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

National Planning Policy Framework

In December 2024 the Government published revised policy guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In this document, Paragraph 11 sets out that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development unless policies within the NPPF indicate development should be restricted. In paragraph 202 the NPPF states that heritage assets should be '*conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance so they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations*'.

In considering changes to the historic environment, paragraph 210 states that account should be taken of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that the conservation of the historic environment can bring.

Paragraph 212 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 and any harm should require clear and convincing justification. Where a proposed development will lead to harm, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (paras 214 and 215).

Para 216 sets out that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement

will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Annex 2 of the NPPF (Glossary sets out the definition of significance. It states that it is the '*value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage assets physical presence, but also from its setting.*'

National Planning Policy Guidance

This is the Government's guidance on interpreting the National Planning Policy Framework and was updated in 2019 in paragraphs 18a-001-20190723 to 18a-071-20190723. The guidance gives advice on topics such as interpreting significance and harm. Of particular relevance to this application are the paragraphs on decision making in regard to the historic environment (18a-006-20190723) on assessing significance and why significance (18a-007-20190723) is important in decision making and how to use an understanding of significance to minimise harm (18a-008-20190723).

The practice guidance confirms that applicants are expected to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected in their application and how this has informed the development proposals, The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance (18a-009-20190723).

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 Adopted May 2019

The Local Plan for the district sets out the planning policies in respect of heritage matters. A summary is set out below.

Heritage Strategy

The Council will give great weight to the conservation of the historic environment in Huntingdonshire. The Council will seek to protect non-designated assets by establishing local lists.

The Council will work to ensure that the effective conservation and enhancement of conservation areas is enabled through a programme of review and updating of conservation area character statements.

The Council will work proactively with property owners and other stakeholders to ensure positive management of heritage assets. This management will recognise the significance of the historic environment and its contribution to local character and identity whilst accommodating the changes necessary to secure viable and sustainable uses. Where possible opportunities will be taken to enable public enjoyment and interpretation of heritage assets.

Policy LP34 states that key assets that contribute to the distinct identity of Huntingdonshire that are a priority for conservation and enhancement include:
a. listed buildings with a wider visual and economic benefit;
b. registered parks and gardens;
c. listed churches;
d. historic built form including distinctive street patterns and traditional building materials, whether it is
part of designated conservation areas or not;
e. historic landscape features, scheduled monuments, archaeological remains and the many ancient and
semi-natural woodlands;
f. the heritage associated with significant historic figures with a local connection.

Great weight and importance is given to the conservation of heritage assets (see 'Glossary') and their settings. The statutory presumption of the avoidance of harm can only be outweighed if there are public benefits that are powerful enough to do so.

A proposal will be required to demonstrate the potential for adverse impacts on the historic environment. Where investigations show that impacts on heritage assets or their settings, whether designated or not, are possible a heritage statement will be required, in a manner proportionate to the asset's significance that:
a. assesses all heritage assets and their settings that would be affected by the proposal, describing and assessing the significance of each asset and its setting to determine its architectural, historical or archaeological interest;
b. sets out how the details of the proposal have been decided upon such that all adverse impacts are avoided as far as possible, or if unavoidable how they will be minimised as far as possible;
c. details how, following avoidance and minimisation, the proposal would impact on the significance and special character of each asset;
d. provides clear justification for the proposal, especially if it would harm the significance of an asset or its setting, so that the harm can be weighed against public benefits; and
e. identifies ways in which the proposal could make a positive contribution to, or better reveal the significance of, affected heritage assets and their settings.

In addition, Policy LP34 states that where site is in a conservation area a proposal within, affecting the setting of, or affecting views into or out of, a conservation area should preserve, and wherever possible enhance, features that contribute positively to the area's character, appearance and setting as set out in character statements or other applicable documents. A proposal should:

k. minimise negative impact on the townscape, roofscape, skyline and landscape through retention of buildings/ groups of buildings, existing street patterns, historic building lines and land form;
l. retain and reinforce local distinctiveness with reference to height, scale, massing, form, materials and plot widths of the existing built environment; as well as retaining architectural details that contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area; and
m. where relevant and practical, remove features that are incompatible with or detract significantly from the conservation area.

Archaeology

If initial site assessment does not provide sufficient information to enable consideration of the impact of the proposal on the significance of archaeological remains, developers will be required to undertake fieldwork evaluation of a site in advance of determination of the application.

St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2016

The Neighbourhood plan sets out the Town Council aspirations for the settlement and acknowledges that heritage matters are a common theme that runs through many planning issues.

Policy SS2 - Utilising Historic Buildings

The Town Council will support the re-use of historic buildings within the Town Centre for town centre uses. Any alterations to historic buildings will need to be sympathetic to the historic and architectural significance and character of the building.

Historic England: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2017

Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 - provides good practice advice on assessing the setting of heritage assets and understanding the proposed impact on that setting. The suggested staged approach to making decisions on setting can also be used to assess the contribution of views to the significance of heritage assets.

The advice note states that by setting out the relationships and considering the level of their contribution to significance, it is possible to gauge impact more transparently and more consistently analysis is to assess whether the setting of an affected heritage asset makes a

contribution to its significance and the extent and/or nature of that contribution; both setting and views which form part of the way a setting is experienced, may be assessed additionally for the degree to which they allow significance to be appreciated.

Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on the significance or on the ability to appreciate it. An assessment of the contribution to the significance of a view does not depend alone on the significance of the heritage assets in the view but on the way the view allows that significance to be appreciated.

3. UNDERSTANDING SIGNIFICANCE

In order to understand the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset the key is to understand the significance of the asset by understanding its history of development. Annex 2 of NPPF sets out the definition of significance. In particular it notes that significance derives not only from the physical presence of a heritage asset, but also from its setting.

Historic England states in its Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance that the requirement set out in the NPPF for an understanding of significance must stem from the interest(s) of the heritage asset, whether archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic, or a combination of these; and that this understanding:

- must describe significance following appropriate analysis, no matter what the level of significance or the scope of the proposal;
- should be sufficient, though no more, for an understanding of the impact of the proposal on the significance, both positive and negative; and
- sufficient for the LPA to come to a judgment about the level of impact on that significance and therefore on the merits of the proposal.

Historic England recommends that technical analyses should be seen primarily as material supporting a clearly expressed and non-technical narrative argument that sets out '*what matters and why*' in terms of the heritage significance of the assets affected, together with the impact of the proposal upon them. Historic England notes that significance and impact are matters of qualitative and expert judgement, they cannot provide a systematic answer.

In gathering evidence to assess the significance, a site visit was made and consultation with a number of sources have been consulted including the Historic England database of listed buildings, www.nls.co.uk and various on line history sources.

Other Relevant sources:

- St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment - October 2006
- St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2016
- St Neots Past by Rosa Young 1996

4. ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the heritage assets can be derived from a number of different but interconnected values based on the evidence on site and through research. This is set out in Conservation Principles (2008) by English Heritage (now Historic England) and the NPPF. Historic England published Advice Note 12 on Statements of Heritage Significance in 2019. Its purpose is to give advice on the analysis and assessment of heritage significance in line with the NPPF to assist all interested parties in implementing the legislation. The advice advocates a staged approach to decision making. The stages are set out as:

1. Understand the form, material and history of the heritage asset;
2. Understand the significance;
3. Understand the impact on that significance;
4. Avoid, minimise and mitigate negative impact;
5. Look for opportunities to better reveal or enhance significance;

The basic principle is to understand the interest or value of a place or building. This is achieved by using the stages as a methodology through which to explore and understand significance. In summary, the significance of a heritage asset is equal to the sum of its special interest. The interest themes are considered to be:

- **Historic or Communal Interest -** is measured by the historical people or events associated with a building.
- **Architectural or Artistic Interest -** is measured by the general character, appearance and aesthetics of the buildings as well as the spaces between.
- **Evidential or Archaeological Interest -** is measured by the evidence yielded from the fabric of the structure or evidence of human influence on change to the environment

A value of high, medium or low is attributed in the conclusion of the significance assessment based on the research and evidence set out:

- **High** – the elements of the heritage asset which are of high value;
- **Medium**– the elements of the heritage asset which are of moderate value;
- **Low** – the elements of the heritage asset which are of limited value.

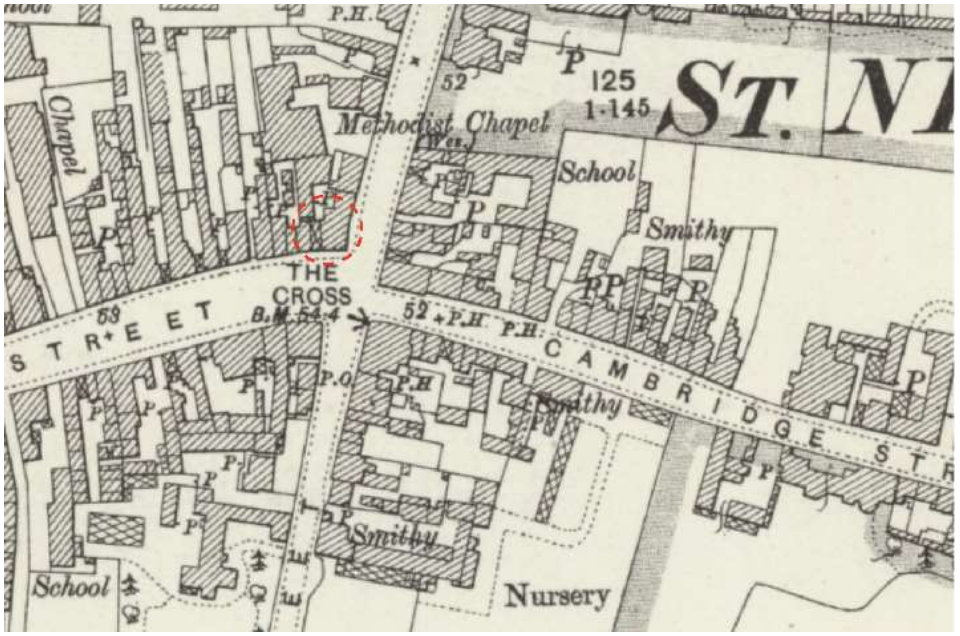
The Designated Heritage Assets affected by the submitted proposal are as follows: https://local-heritage-list.org.uk/cambridgeshire/map

- 57 High Street, Grade II
- St Neots Conservation Area
- No.2 Huntington Street, - Grade II (setting)
- no local list buildings identified on the neighbourhood plan.

OS Map 1889



OS Map 1901

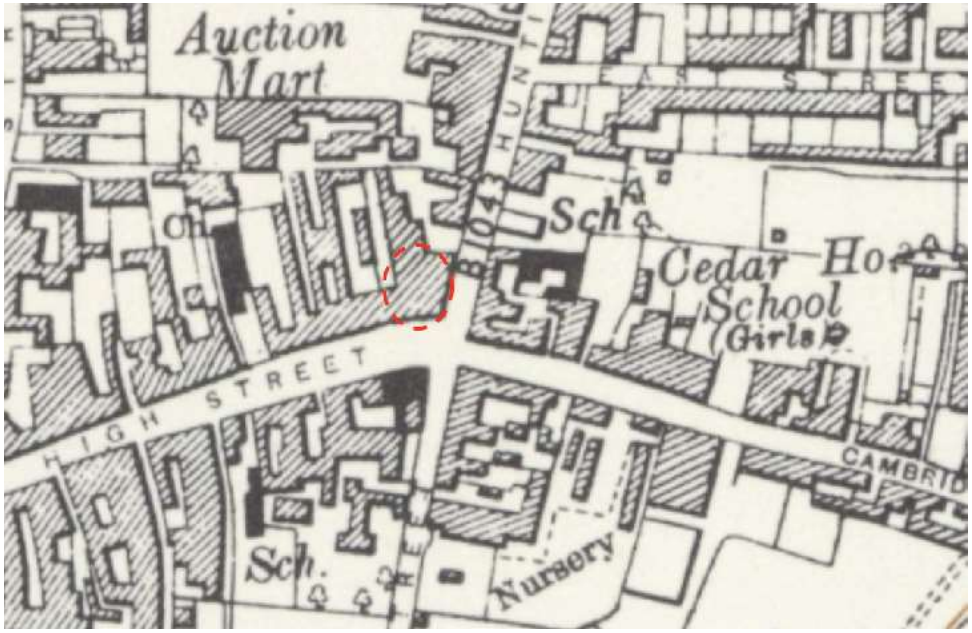


Historic Interest

The conservation area appraisal describes St Neots as a town with an ancient market (chartered 1130) in association with an abbey founded in Saxon Times. St Neots is an agglomeration of separate historic settlements. It was originally part of the ecclesiastical parish of Eynesbury before becoming a parish in its own right in 1204. Critical to St Neots wealth and development is the River Great Ouse which became navigable from 1639. The railway arrived in 1850

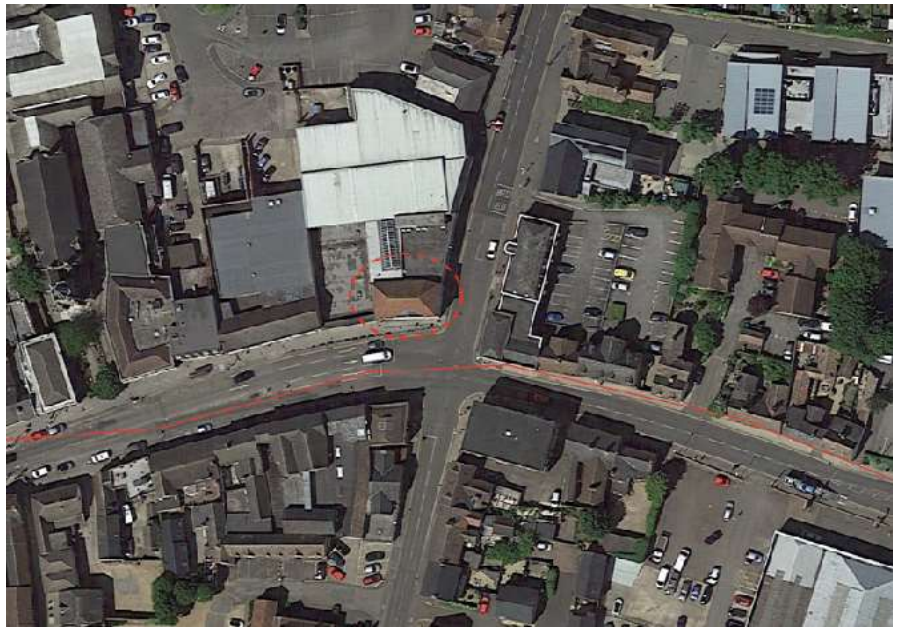
The application site is very clearly on a cross roads between the High Street, Huntingdon Street, St Mary's Street and Cambridge Street and believed to be the location of the original Anglo Saxon settlement. The application site building, former Assembly House, stands on the corner between High Street and Huntingdon Street. The earliest map showing detail of 1889 shows the Methodist Chapel is to the rear of this building until about 1950 when it is demolished.

OS Map 1958



After the Methodist Chapel is demolished c. 1950, the building appears to be extended to the rear and possibly to the west, although the detail on the 1950 map is more limited. The historic photos below, show some further detail around this time.

Google Earth

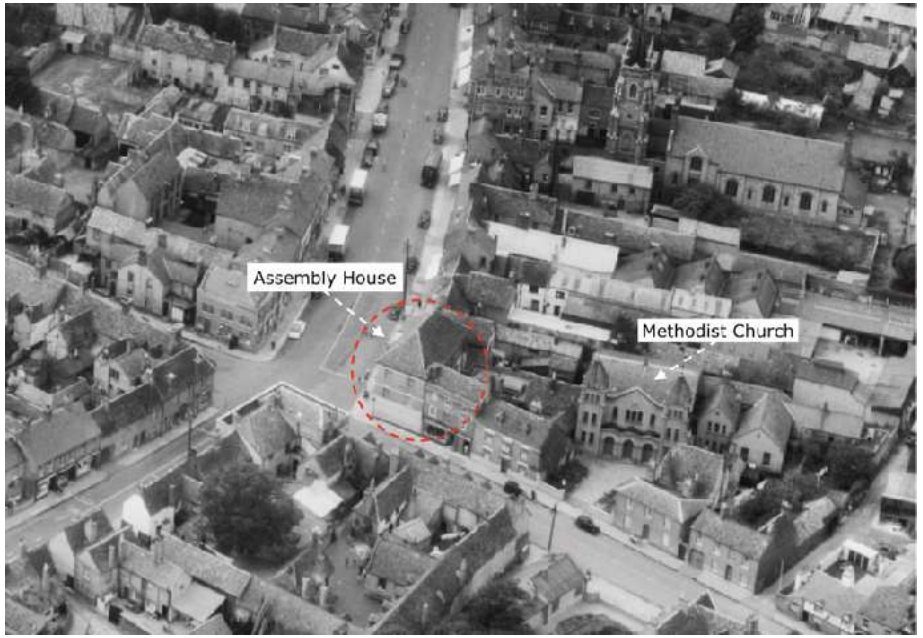


The Google earth extract shows the development of the site with large warehouse buildings to the rear of the Assembly Rooms to accommodate the department store, previously Westgate House and last operating as Beales.

EAW003728 ENGLAND (1947). Flooding surrounding the town and St Mary's Church, St Neots, from the south-west,



EAW033048 ENGLAND (1950). The High Street and town, St Neots

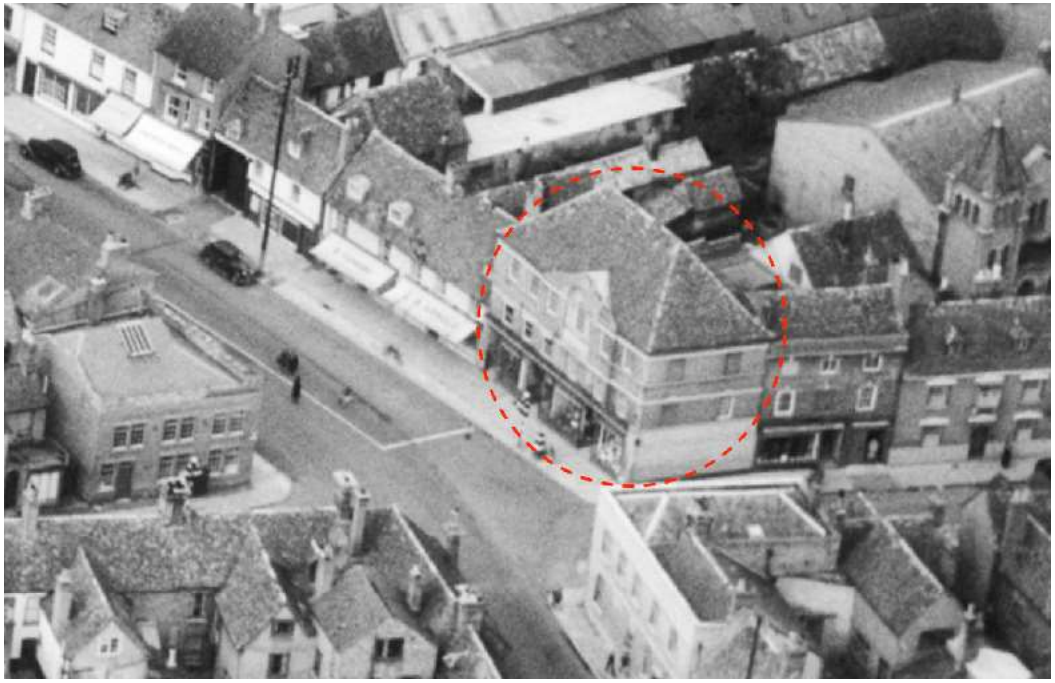


The mid C20 aerial maps assist in understanding the historic context for the site. There are several of St Neots which record the layout of the town in the post war period and before substantial change to the high street. The above images have been zoomed into the site with a red circle to show Assembly House.

Assembly House can be seen from almost all angles in these images and its prominent position on an important historic cross roads. The prominence of the building is emphasised by its height referencing the important role it once had. To the rear is the Methodist Church which John Wesley once preached at and is said to have also held meetings in Assembly House. [1]

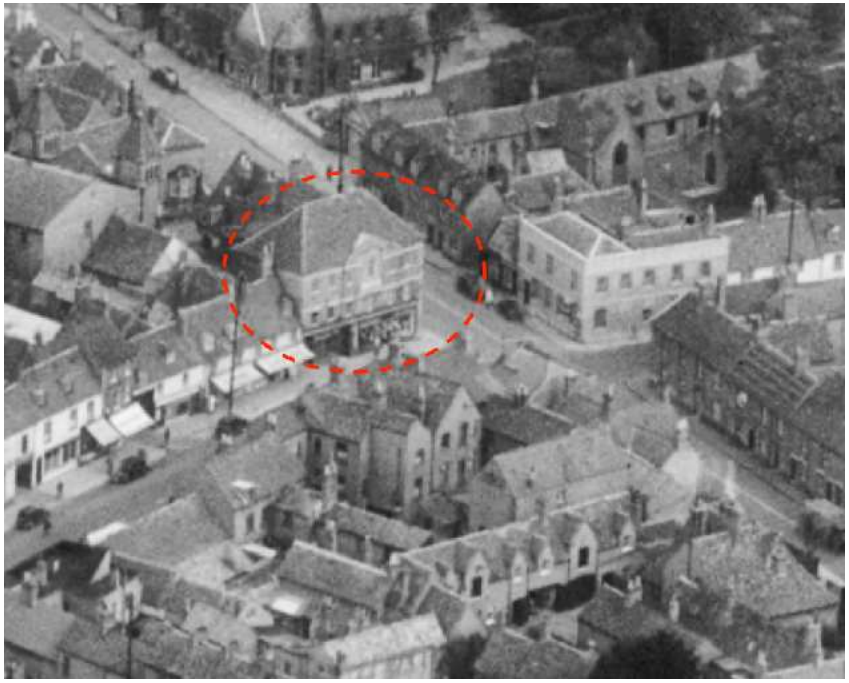
[1] [1] St Neots Past - Rosa Young 1996

EAW033050 ENGLAND (1950). The town, St Neots



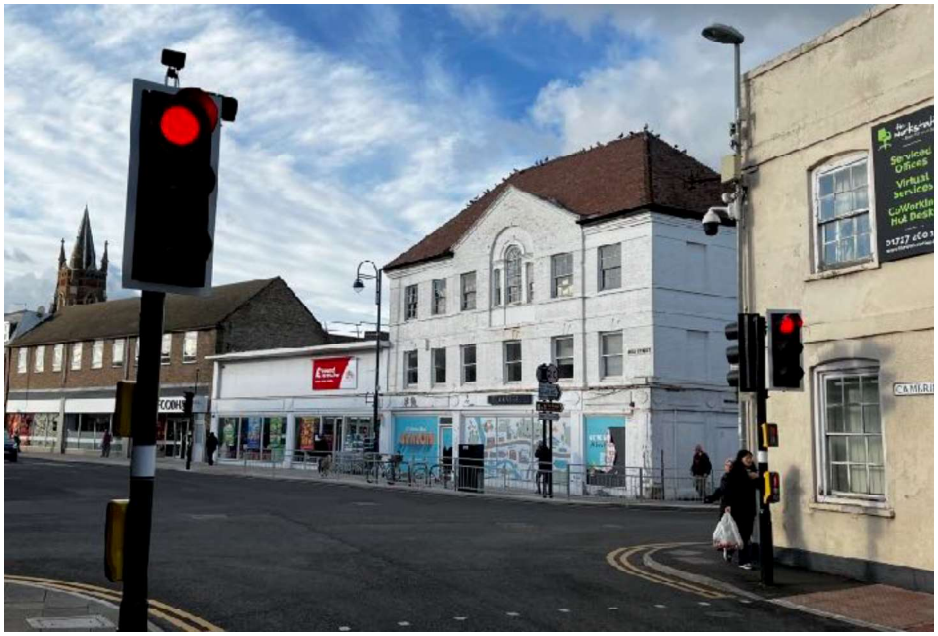
Theses images clearly show the shopfront at lower ground floor level with a series of two - three storey buildings to the west and to the north facing onto the street. The rear yard appears to have a jostle of buildings, beyond which are the distinctive linear burgage plots to the rear of several buildings.

EAW033050 ENGLAND (1950). The town, St Neots



The former Methodist church to the rear is also visible in these views, a building with a large footprint which appears to have been demolished shortly after these images were taken, leading to the warehouse expansion for the department store in the late C20.

Assembly House looking west



Assembly House looking south



Architectural Interest:

The above image taken in 2024 shows the building as it appears on the High Street today. It has been vacant for over 5 years and was last used as part of Beales Department Store, which extended into the buildings to the rear. The buildings to the west were demolished to make way for the flat roof extension and the this is replicated to the north with a further flat roofed extension and a wrap around shop front to provide a sense of unity to the ground floor entrance .

Assembly House, originally of brick construction, has been painted white as part of the overall ambition to unify the historic and modern extensions to the listed building. The buildings to the rear are all an open plan modern extension for the former Co-operative and later Beales Department store.

Assembly House 1899



Assembly House 1975



Not many historic images have survived of Assembly House in its earlier form. The above image show the building in 1899. It was built in 1740 by Joseph Eayre, who had a bell foundry in the town[2]. The building was constructed of Gault brick with a stone cornice and a hipped tiled roof. Its central feature is the Venetian window built within an arched recess at second floor level. Behind the Venetian window was the Assembly rooms. A carriageway entrance was at ground floor.

The ground floor was originally built as the George Inn but was delicensed and converted into small tenements by 1773. The main assembly room was said to have had a fine plaster ceiling and a suspended dome feature. John Wesley was said to have preached at meetings in the Assembly Rooms, but no evidence has been found for this in historic newspaper articles. By the 1970s the ground floor had been converted to a Co-op supermarket.

[2] St Neots Past - Rosa Young 1996

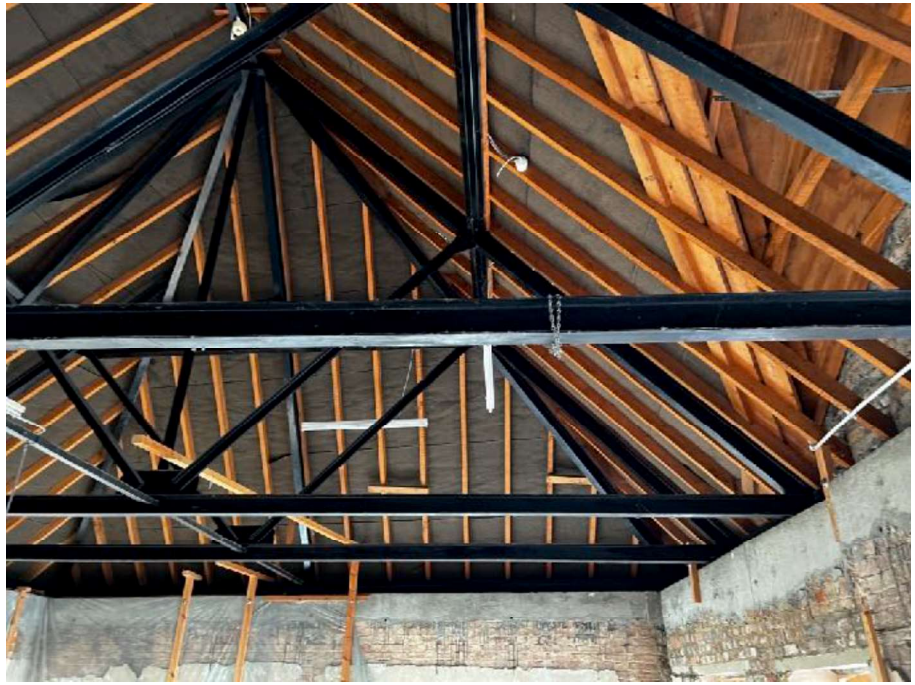
Westgate Department Store, 2009 (from application reference 0901132LBC)





2024 - note the painted brickwork

The Former Assembly Room - new metal roof, purlins and felt



The Former Assembly Room - plaster removed



Internal Condition - Second Floor

The exterior of the building and its setting has been heavily altered in the latter part of the C20/early C21st. The former Assembly Rooms, once reputably containing ornate plasterwork. At the time of its listing in 1951 the description described the Assembly room as having a domed centre piece with ceiling rose, and wooden orchestral gallery at east end. Ceiling with coved cornice. There is evidence of some substantial structural issues historically within this space that have led to the loss of the plasterwork and a replacement roof. Probably when it was a department store. The new roof may have protected the masonry from water ingress and further damage.

The Former Assembly Room -First Floor Rooms



The Former Assembly Room - First floor rooms



First Floor

The first floor was originally residential accommodation. In more recent years this floor appears to have been used for back office space. This set of rooms are again is devoid of most historic features with lowered ceilings, removed fireplaces, modern doors, lighting, radiators and skirting boards.

The rooms have also been left in a poor states of repair and the original plan and room layout having also been altered over time.

The Former Assembly Room - Ground Floor



The Former Assembly Room - Ground Floor



Ground Floor

The ground floor is now a series of large open spaces, used as the shop floor for Beales, and before that Westgate and the Co-operative. The column painted red and yellow and a second column in grey carrying the large timber joists the full depth of the building represent the location of the former carriageway through the building as shown on the 1899 picture above.

In general this space is now also devoid of its historic layout, room plans, joinery details and original form.

The Former Assembly Room - external -deteriorating shop front



The Former Assembly Room - external - rotting timber



Shopfront

The shopfront was altered by 1975, as can be see on the black and white image above and does not represent an early historic shopfront. From the planning records available on the Council's planning portal, there appears to have been an upgrade or refurbishment works to the shopfront circa 209. The shopfront is now in a poor state of repair with paint peeling, removed signs and deteriorating fascia boards.

The Former Assembly Room -internal modern shop front



The Former Assembly Room -external modern shop front



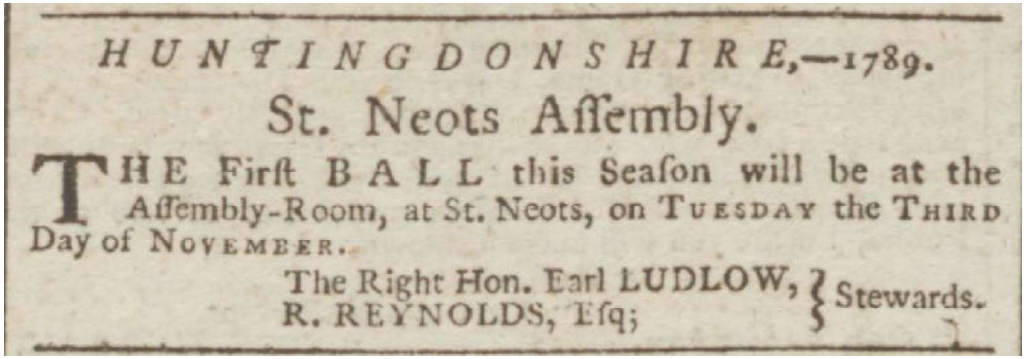
The images from 1899 and 1975 of the shopfront on the previous pages illustrate that the change in the C20 removed the historic shopfront and replaced it with a modern shopfront. Behind the vinyl and as can be seen in the 1975 image is the modern shopfront with large aperture windows and any evidence of the earlier Victorian shopfront having been removed.

History of Assembly Rooms

Assembly Rooms were a fairly common building type across England. They would vary from place to place, depending on the importance of the town or area. They were often built for a specific purpose but also many assembly rooms were adapted existing buildings. In many places, they comprised rooms above an inn such as at St Neots which appears to have been a combination of purpose built Inn with an Assembly room above. Perhaps the most famous purpose built Assembly Rooms is at Bath, designed in 1769 by John Wood the Younger. One of the earliest examples of a purpose built Assembly Rooms were the grand York Assembly Rooms built in 1732, designed by Lord Burlington. This Assembly room, as a building type is an early example, though internally it has lost much of its architectural interest as a result of changes and adaptation in the C20.

Assembly Rooms in England were popular in the C18 and C19. Their purpose was as a respectable meeting place for the upper and high status members of society to gather, dance, listen to music, play cards or to meet up and importantly, in the Georgian context, to meet for potential marriage prospects and fortuitous unions between families.

Newspaper clippings - Northampton_Mercury_24_October_1789



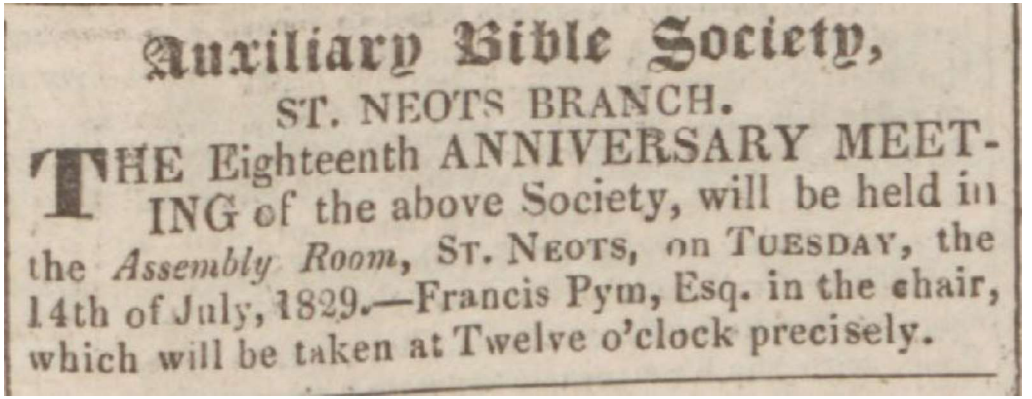
HUNTINGDONSHIRE,—1789.

St. Neots Assembly.

THE First BALL this Season will be at the Assembly-Room, at St. Neots, on TUESDAY the THIRD Day of NOVEMBER.

The Right Hon. Earl LUDLOW, } Stewards.
R. REYNOLDS, Esq;

Newspaper clippings - Huntingdon_Bedford__Peterborough_04_July_1829

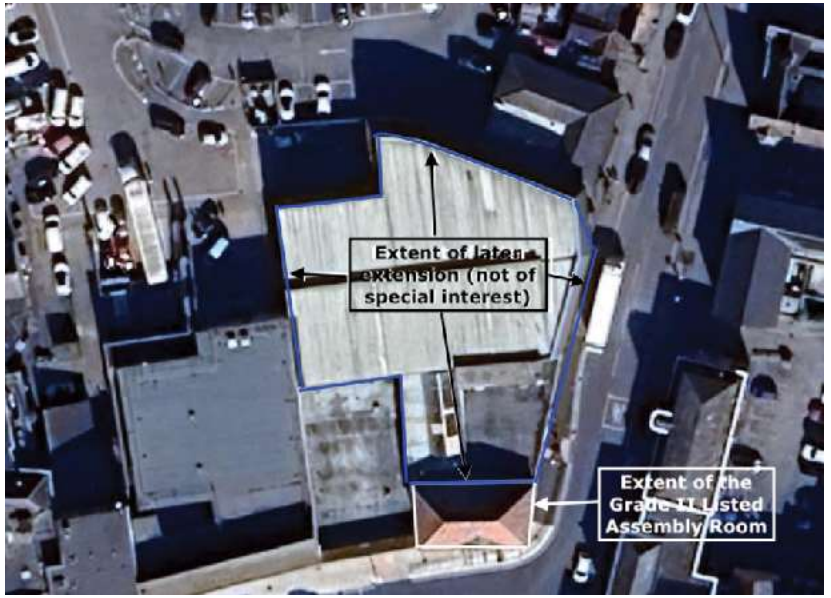


Auxiliary Bible Society,

ST. NEOTS BRANCH.

THE Eighteenth ANNIVERSARY MEETING of the above Society, will be held in the *Assembly Room*, ST. NEOTS, on TUESDAY, the 14th of July, 1829.—Francis Pym, Esq. in the chair, which will be taken at Twelve o'clock precisely.





Extent of the Listed Building

The extent of the listed building is important to note when considering this application as it has been substantially extended in the late C20 for the then department store. The image above shows the footprint of the building as a department store is considerably enlarged and the rear elevation has no historic or architectural merit.

Summary of Significance

The Assembly House at St Neots is a Grade II listed building with special historic and architectural interest which must be preserved. The assessment on the previous pages demonstrate that this Assembly House has retained some of its historic interest as a building type, it is much altered and adapted to the point where much of its architectural significance has been lost.

It is, however a prominent building signifying its earlier important role within the town as a convening space to bring people together. Its size is larger than many other buildings that surround it, also relating to its role as a partially civic building, having been commissioned for the local people to use and hold meetings. Its location on an important cross road within the town is also of significance, itself a meeting place and one which relates to the origins of the settlement of St Neots.

As a purpose built Assembly House dating to 1740, it is a relatively early example of a building type. Such buildings became more common towards to the middle and end of the C18 and much larger, often taking the form of a single elongated room, as at Bath Assembly Rooms.

In summary its historic interest within the context of St Neots and the country is moderate. The external envelope to the building has retained much of its original appearance, except for the painted brickwork, but internally it has unfortunately been gutted, therefore having low architectural interest inside the building.

Overall, the Assembly House is of **moderate to low significance**. Whilst the shell of the building retains suggestion of its historic use and form, it is much diminished as it has been adapted so as to have lost most of its special interest. The submitted proposal is for works to the ground floor which has been substantially altered in the late C20 to create a shop entrance for the former department store and so is of no heritage significance.

Conservation Area and Listed Buildings

The application site falls within the St Neots Conservation Area. A number of listed buildings are also included within this area, the setting of which is important to consider when change is proposed. No.2 Huntingdon Street was listed Grade II in 1971. It was built in the C18 and also had a carriageway entrance onto Huntingdon Street, later blocked and the main entrance onto Cambridge Street removed. It is a plain stucco 2 storey building with a high parapet, giving the appearance of a flat roof. It dominates the view from west along the High Street, appearing to project further into the road as the road itself widens. Further along Cambridge Street is a small two storey cottage, with pan-tile roof, pair of chimneys, also rendered but with no door onto the street.

The spire to the parish Church of St Mary further to the west is visible above the roof tops to the settlement and visible in the skyline and in the context of the cross roads to Assembly House.

The Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes St Neots market Square and riverfront as the memorable images of the town. The historic architecture is on the scale of other Huntingdonshire market towns demonstrating St Neots importance as a trading and commercial centre from the C17. The crossroads are noted as being of great antiquity and the origins of the Saxon Settlement. The view along High Street to St Neots Cross is noted to be of importance.

The Conservation Area Boundary extends widely across the settlement and there are other areas, such as the Market Square and riverfront which would merit being of higher quality character and appearance and therefore significance the application site is located within an area of lower architectural quality. The Conservation Area appraisal notes that it was particularly the north side of High Street which experienced the most demolition and modern infill, largely unsuccessfully. The loss of the historic buildings around Assembly House together with the addition of poorly constructed flat roof extensions to the building have eroded the character and appearance of this part of St Neots. The long term vacancy of this large building further detracts its character.

This part of the Conservation Area is of low significance, but with opportunities to enhance the character and appearance through careful re-use of Assembly House bring activity to this part of the High Street.

5. IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

To assess the impact there are a series of legislative and policy considerations which begin with the statutory duty for the Local Planning Authority. These are as follows:

Under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, there is a statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the [listed] building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

There is a similar provision for Conservation Areas under section 72 which states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. This statutory duty for heritage assets carries great weight in decision taking.

The next series of steps are set out in the NPPF (2024) which requires the assessor to demonstrate these have been taken and the Council to replicate this stepped approach to its assessment. The steps are:

1. Identify heritage assets and describe their significance (para 207). This step is set out in the previous section which sets out the research and understanding of the assets that has informed significance and concludes the level of significance.
2. Assess the likely impact of the proposed development on the significance of the identified assets (para 212). Impact comprises both harm and enhancement. If harm identified set out the degree to which the impact would likely to be harmful, i.e. substantial, total loss or less than substantial harm (para 212, 213 and 214).
3. Attach great weight to harm and enhancement (para 212 and 213). Weight is attached equally to harm and benefits (see glossary - Conservation for heritage policy).
4. If harm identified is less than substantial harm, balance such harm against the public benefits (including securing optimum viable use) - para 215.
5. Conclude the overall impact in the context of the statutory duty as set out in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and whether the proposal complies with planning policy at national and local level.

The Submitted Proposal

The proposed works seek planning permission and listed building consent for:

- 1 no. new fire door fitted to new lobby set back with a structural opening of 850mm in the the position of the existing. To be compliant with building regulations as an escape door to replace the existing door. New door to match the existing in appearance.
- Secondary glazing to the modern shop floor windows on the ground floor south elevation to the existing single glazed units.
- Like for like repair to the existing timber facade of the shopfront, filling fixed holes, surface repairs and redecorating to match the existing in white.

Assessment of Impact

This section looks at the 5 policy steps to understand the overall impact of the submitted proposal. They are as follows:

Step 1 Identify the Significance of the Heritage Assets

The previous section has considered the significance of the heritage assets through understanding the historic and architectural interest of the listed buildings as well as the character and appearance of the conservation area. The proposed changes to the shopfront are not in an area of special heritage significance and will enable to building to be occupied again..

The previous section concluded in the Conservation Area that the area around Assembly House is of some heritage to the town and therefore is of some significance.

Step 2 Consider the impact of the proposed development on the identified significance

In considering potential impact on significance, para 212 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to the assets conservation. Where there is harm, there should be clear and convincing justification for that harm.

The proposed changes include the alterations to the modern shop front to make the building thermally efficient, more secure and safe to use. The proposed new use of the former department is as a gym (which will be the subject of the tenants application). The proposed changes are minimal and will not impact or perceptibly change the overall appearance of the listed building and will therefore sustain both the significance of the listed building and the conservation area. The recessed door lobby will replicated the earlier lobby position and is in an area where there was historically a recess. The repair works to the modern shop front will enhance the overall appearance of the building.

Step 3 Great weight is attached to the conservation of the assets
There is a policy requirement under Section 16 of the NPPF to give great weight to the conservation of a heritage asset. Conservation is defined in the NPPF glossary as the '*process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance*'.

Great weight has been given to the conservation of the Heritage Assets in the submitted proposal to ensure that the impact is limited, whilst enabling the new proposed use to operate. This will have the benefit of bringing this building back into use, contributing to the high street and therefore investment back into the building.

Step 4 Set out any harm or benefits and the degree to which they are harmful or beneficial

Under Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 there is a statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which a listed building possesses and to desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area.

In summary, the assessment has concluded that this part of the conservation area is of moderate quality. The submitted proposal will have a limited low impact and would therefore **sustain** the listed building and character and appearance of the conservation area and the contribution that the setting makes to significance. The proposal also gives new opportunities to facilitate the new use of the building and **enhance** its position on the high street.

6. CONCLUSION

There is a statutory duty on the Local Planning Authority in regard to Section 72 of the of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 that requires Local Planning Authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

The NPPF (2024) states that, in determining planning applications, the applicant should describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. This Statement has fulfilled the requirements of Section 16 of the NPPF.

The NPPF also states that local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. 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.

Planning Policy Compliance

As set out in the previous section, the submitted proposal is relatively minor in the changes it would make to the external appearance the late C20 shopfront. The submitted proposal is for small scale alterations to part of the building which has already been substantially altered and for which these proposed changes will have a minimal impact upon the significance of the listed building and the conservation area.

Therefore, the proposal would sustain to the character and appearance of the conservation area and the special interest of the listed building. There is also an opportunity to enhance through the repair of the modern shopfront. Harm has not been identified as part of this assessment and the proposal represents the first step in securing a new use as a gym, for which the tenant will shortly submit an application. Therefore the submitted proposal would be in accordance with Local and National Planning Policy.

Appendix A List Descriptions

1. HIGH STREET (North Side) No 57

TL 1860 1/40 10.1.51. 2590 II

2. C18 later, former town Assembly Rooms; altered. 3 storeys. Regular facade of 6 windows with slightly projecting 3 window centre with open pediment. 2 window return. Hipped tiled roof. Gault brick with moulded stone cornice and continuous stone bands at head and cill levels of 1st and 2nd floor windows. Centre bay with Venetian window in arched recess to 2nd floor; 2nd floor windows recessed with exposed boxing to sashes with original glazing bars; 1st floor sash windows with stucco voussoirs. Ground floor altered. The former main Assembly Room, which is said to have had associations with Wesley, is a large room at 2nd floor level with a domed centre piece with ceiling rose, and wooden orchestral gallery at east end. Ceiling with coved cornice.

Listing NGR: TL1851960350