{\b DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION}

The application site is a commercial shop to the front with residential accommodation above and to the rear. It is located within the St Neots Conservation Area and is in Flood Zone 2. There are several Listed Buildings opposite the application site along Cambridge Street.

The proposal is for erection of an external staircase.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

{\b NATIONAL GUIDANCE}

The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

The NPPF 2023 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed safe places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

{\b PLANNING POLICIES}

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)

LP2: Strategy for Development
LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
LP5: Flood Risk
LP7: Spatial Planning Areas
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP21: Town Centre Vitality and Viability
LP22: Local Services and Community Facilities
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings

Planning Practice Guidance is also relevant and a material consideration.

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2017
- Developer Contributions SPD 2011
- Developer Contributions: Updated Costs 2023/24
- Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment (2022)
- Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
- Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2017
- Annual Monitoring Review regarding housing land supply (2024)
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)

The National Design Guide (2021)

* C2 - Value heritage, local history and culture
* I1 - Respond to existing local character and identity
* M3 - Well-considered parking, servicing and utilities infrastructure for all users
* H1 - Healthy, comfortable and safe internal and external environment
* H2 - Well-related to external amenity and public spaces

St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2029 (2016)
* Policy A3 - Design
* Policy SS2 - Utilising Historic Buildings

St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment (October 2006)

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

{\b PLANNING HISTORY}

None

{\b CONSULTATIONS}

St Neots Town Council recommends approval. It is considered that the proposal would have a limited impact on neighbours.

{\b REPRESENTATIONS}

No objections received at time of determination.

{\b SUMMARY OF ISSUES}

When determining planning applications, it is necessary to establish what weight should be given to each plan's policies in order to come to a decision. The following legislation, government policy and guidance outline how this should be done.

As set out within the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 38(6)) and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 70(2)) in dealing with planning applications the Local Planning Authority shall have regard to have provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. This is reiterated within paragraph 47 of the NPPF (2021). The development plan is defined in Section 38(3)(b) of the

2004 Act as "the development plan documents (taken as a whole) that have been adopted or approved in that area".

In Huntingdonshire the Development Plan consists of:
- Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (2019)
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)
- St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2029 (2016)
- Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017)
- Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan (2018)
- Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan (2019)
- Bury Village Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
- Buckden Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
- Grafham and Ellington Neighbourhood Plan (2022)
- Great Gransden Neighbourhood Plan (2023)
- Sawtry Neighbourhood Plan (2023)
- The Stukeleys Neighbourhood Plan (2023)

The statutory term 'material considerations' has been broadly construed to include any consideration relevant in the circumstances which bears on the use or development of the land: Cala Homes (South) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Anor [2011] EWHC 97 (Admin); [2011] 1 P. & C.R. 22, per Lindblom J. Whilst accepting that the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan, paragraph 2 confirms that it is a material consideration and significant weight is given to this in determining applications.

The main issues to consider are:

- The Principle of Development
- Design, visual amenity and impact upon the designated heritage assets
- Amenity
- Biodiversity

* The Principle of Development

The lawful and existing use of the site is mixed commercial and residential. The application does not seek to change this use and only seeks to erect a staircase to the rear of the building for access to the residential accommodation. Therefore, the principle of development is already established subject to compliance with the other relevant policies and considerations.

* Design, visual amenity and impact upon the designated heritage assets

Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 state that developments should respond positively to their context, draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings and contribute positively to the area's character and identity.

Policy LP34 states that 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.

The Council will consider the significance of a designated heritage asset and where there is less than substantial harm, this will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Where there is deemed to be substantial harm, then the proposal would need to achieve substantial public benefits to outweigh that harm.

The proposal falls within the St Neots Conservation Area.

Section 72 of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990 states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

Para. 212 of the NPPF set out 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 the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'. Para. 213 states that 'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification...'

Local Plan policy LP34 aligns with the statutory provisions and NPPF advice.

10A Cambridge Street is within the St Neots Conservation Area. The proposed works are for an external staircase to access residential accommodation to the rear of the building. It is to be constructed of steel and is a plain industrial design. It is located to the rear of the building, within a narrow open yard area, providing an independent access to the residential accommodation on the first floor. There will be no visibility of the structure from the public highway or the wider conservation area.

Officers have had special regard to the desirability of preserving Conservation Area. Due to the location of the proposed external staircase, at the rear of the property, it is considered that there would not be any significant detrimental impact upon the visual amenity or the character of the Conservation Area.

Therefore, it is considered that harm will not be caused to the Conservation Area, because the works will have a neutral impact on the preservation and enhancement of the St Neots Conservation Area, and are therefore in accordance with ss. 16, 66 & 72 of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990, the NPPF (2024), and also with policies LP12 and LP34 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

* Amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

The external staircase is to be constructed of steel with an open appearance. The floor plans confirm that the ground floor consists of a hair salon to the

front, with a storeroom to the rear with a small wc. The staircase is positioned to the rear of the property and crosses in front of a ground floor window that serves a storeroom related to the hair salon at the front of the property. It is noted that an existing doorway at ground floor level will remain blocked up and out of use. Therefore, it is accepted that there will be no impact upon the amenity use of the ground floor commercial unit.

Therefore, overall, the proposal is considered to accord with Policy LP14 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 in this regard.

* Biodiversity

Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 states that a proposal will be required to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated. A proposal will ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type and location of development.

It is noted that the proposal is below the development threshold applying to the requirement to provide a Biodiversity Net Gain as set out in Paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) as there is no impact upon a priority habitat and no loss of on-site habitat. It is noted that the proposed structure will result in the construction of an external staircase within an area of hardstanding.

In addition, whilst the proposal does not include measures to achieve a net gain in biodiversity there is no net loss and so the proposal is considered to accord with Policy LP30 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and the NPPF (2023) in this regard.

There are no other material planning considerations which have a significant bearing on the determination of this application.

* Conclusion

The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as it:

* Is of an appropriate scale and design;
* Would not have a harmful impact upon the designated heritage asset;
* Would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the amenity of neighbours;
* Would not have a harmful impact upon biodiversity.

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

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