DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 16th SEPTEMBER 2024

Case No: 24/00515/HDC

Proposal: REFURBISHMENT AND EXTENSION OF EXISTING

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES TO INCLUDE DEMOLITION OF EXISTING SINGLE STOREY EXTENSION AND REPLACEMENT TWO-STOREY EXTENSION WITH SCREENED PLANT AT ROOF LEVEL, FIRST FLOOR EXTENSIONS TO EAST AND WEST ELEVATIONS, GLAZED DORMER WINDOW TO EAST ELEVATION, CREATION OF EXTERNAL RAMPS AND STEPS, CANOPIES OVER ENTRANCES. GLAZED GROUND FLOOR **EXTENSION ON WEST ELEVATION. INSTALLATION** OF SOLAR PANELS, REPLACEMENT CHIMNEY, NEW BALCONY TO WEST ELEVATION. ALTERATIONS TO BALUSTRADE ON RIVERSIDE AND REPLACEMENT

FENESTRATION AND DOORS.

Location: PRIORY CENTRE, PRIORY LANE, ST NEOTS, PE19

2BH

Applicant: HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Grid Ref: 518089 260332

Date of Registration: 2 APRIL 2024

Parish: ST NEOTS

RECOMMENDATION – APPROVE

This application is referred to the Development Management Committee (DMC) as the application has been submitted by the Council for a development on its land.

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The site

- 1.1 The application relates to the Priory Centre, an existing community building which provides space for community use and private hire, including weddings and family events, conference activities and local business meetings. It also contains the offices and meeting rooms for St Neots Town Council.
- 1.2 The existing building sits along the edge of the Great River Ouse to the west and is accessible by foot from the Priory Centre car

park to the north, the Priory Lane car park to the east and from the south by foot or vehicle from Priory Lane. The building is prominent in longer distance views from Regatta Meadows to west.

- 1.3 The site lies within the St Neots Conservation Area and there are a number of designated assets within close proximity to the site, including three Listed Buildings (The Maltings Grade II, Priory House Grade II and The Priory Grade II) and 2 Scheduled Monuments (The Malting(kiln) and St Neots Priory). The views of the riverside and views from Regatta Meadows towards this site are important views which are noted in the St Neots Conservation Character statement (October 2006). The cone of the Malting(kiln) scheduled monument and listed building with its landmark shape is prominent in longer distance views across the river meadows from Eaton Socon.
- 1.4 The site is predominantly within Flood Zone 2 on the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning and a section of the site falls within Flood Zone 3b (Functional Flood Plain) in Huntingdonshire's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2017).

The proposal

- 1.5 The application seeks planning permission for the refurbishment and extension of the existing community building and town council offices, including demolition of the existing single storey extension and replacement two storey extension with screened plant at roof level; first floor extensions to the east and west elevations; a glazed dormer window to the east elevation and the addition of external ramps and steps; canopies over entrances; a glazed ground floor link extension on the west elevation; installation of solar panels; replacement chimney; new external balcony on the west elevation; alterations to balustrade on riverside and replacement fenestration and doors.
- 1.6 Section 1.3 of the Design & Access statement sets out the business case behind the proposals:
 - To enhance community use, including increased capacity for performance in the Great Hall and Guest Hall and additional flexible hall space – all modernised and sized to enhance flexibility and the range of use in all spaces.
 - Increased private hire and a boosted performance programme.
 - Additional smaller rooms for small group, social services and meeting use including the potential for an office hub or local business service. All smaller rooms offering flexible use for more than one use including changing and green room facilities.

- An enhanced Bar and Café Bistro offer within the entrance foyer, supporting the venue rooms and open onto the riverside.
- New welcoming SNTC offices, optimising space use, with room to grow the team within modern methods of working practices.
- 1.7 The justification for the scheme is contained in the submitted Design & Access statement. Section 3.6 of the statement states that the current building runs at a commercial loss of approximately £300,000 per year. The building suffers from poor fabric performance and many systems are at the end of their operational life and need upgrading, including the heating, cooling and ventilation systems. It is proposed to replace these with modern efficient low carbon alternatives.
- In terms of existing usage of the building, the building offers large bookable spaces (Great Hall and Guest Hall) which are often booked for facilities which do not require all the available space but there are currently no smaller bookable spaces on offer. Furthermore, as an affordable community venue, bookings for community performances and private bookings often conflict or impact upon wide community use bookings. The problem of capacity is a common challenge for community centres such as the Priory Centre with profitable or high impact bookings missed or overlooked when lower capacity activities keep a small number of spaces occupied for part of a day, often on long term arrangements.
- 1.9 The proposal looks to improve on and deliver additional bookable rooms/spaces of varying sizes to promote full use throughout the day, week, and year offering facilities for conference hire, community groups, family events and a wide range of performance. It is proposed to increase the capacity for performance in the Great Hall and Guest Hall, and provide an additional smaller flexible space (New Hall) for family events, community uses and Town Council meetings. Several smaller flexible bookable rooms are also proposed for small group, social services and meeting use as well as changing and green room facilities for performance events. The proposals also look to make the building more accessible and inclusive, for example, provision of level access to the main entrance, external ramps and internal lift system.
- 1.10 Amended plans and documents have been submitted during the lifetime of the application. Re-consultation has taken place accordingly.

2. NATIONAL GUIDANCE

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) (NPPF 2023) sets out the three objectives economic, social and environmental of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2023 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).'
- 2.2 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, beautiful and safe places;
 - conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.
- 2.3 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places general duty as respects listed buildings in exercise of planning functions. Paragraph (1) states 'in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority... 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.
- 2.4 Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a general duty as respects conservation areas in exercise of planning functions. Paragraph (1) sets out that 'with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area... special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.'

For full details visit the government website National Guidance

3. PLANNING POLICIES

- 3.1 Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)
 - LP1: Amount of Development
 - LP2: Strategy for Development
 - LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
 - LP5: Flood Risk
 - LP6: Waste Water Management
 - LP7: Spatial Planning Areas
 - LP11: Design Context
 - LP12: Design Implementation
 - LP14: Amenity
 - LP15: Surface Water
 - LP16: Sustainable Travel
 - LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement

- LP21: Town Centre Vitality and Viability
- LP22: Local Services and Community Facilities
- LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- LP31: Trees, Woodland Hedges and Hedgerows
- LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings
- LP35: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
- 3.2 St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2029 (Adopted 24 February 2016)
 - Policy A1 Public Realm
 - Policy A3 Design
 - Policy PT1 Sustainable Travel
 - Policy P3 River Setting
 - Policy P4 Flooding
- 3.3 St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment (October 2006)
- 3.4 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:
 - Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017)
 - Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
 - Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment (2022)
 - Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD (2017)

For full details visit HDC's website Local policies

4. PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 1401477FUL Modification to existing boundary wall, construction of the new garden wall, removal of glazed porch and installation of new window Approved
- 4.2 0906847PDE Replace wooden double street side doors with metal fire doors Planning permission required
- 4.3 0602562FUL Alterations and extension to covered space Approved
- 4.4 0403238FUL Erection of two pairs of gates Approved
- 4.5 0212783ADV Display of illuminated signs Consented

5. CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 St Neot Town Council No comments.
- 5.2 Environment Agency No objection but strongly recommend that the mitigation measures detailed in the FRA are adhered to. In particular, the FRA states there will be no loss of floodplain

capacity as a result of the works and finished floor levels will be set at 16.32AOD.

- 5.3 Local Lead Flood Authority No objection. It appears that the applicant is proposing the demolition of an existing single storey extension and the replacement of a two-storey extension. The proposal does not appear to result in an increase in impermeable area. As per the outline drainage plan, it appears the roof area is reduced from 160m2 to 130m2 with the roof area proposed to drain to the existing private surface water drain alongside the building. In turn, this will discharge into River Great Ouse replicating the existing scenario. An initial CCTV survey was undertaken. A detailed CCTV is proposed at the later stage. Conditions recommended.
- 5.4 HDC Urban Design No objection. The amendments to the massing and design of the SNTC offices and dormer window are an improvement from the original submission, address previous comments and are supported in design terms. Suggested conditions materials, architectural details, hard and soft landscaping, lighting and signage.
- 5.5 HDC Conservation Team Do not support. The proposals do not preserve the identified listed building and their setting, will harm the significance of the Scheduled Monument The Maltings Kiln, and does not have regard to the preservation and enhancement of the St Neots Conservation Area. The level of harm to each of these individual assets will vary, the greatest level of harm being to the setting of the Maltings Kiln Scheduled monument, Under the terms of the NPPF it is considered to be in the 'less than substantial category' but this is not to say that the level of harm is not serious as there is a statutory presumption to avoid all harm. The level of identified harm to these 4 individual heritage assets can only be accepted if it is considered that there are sufficient public benefits flowing from this development to outweigh the harm that will be caused to each of these assets.
- 5.6 Historic England Object to the application on heritage grounds due to inappropriate development within the St Neots Conservation Area. We consider that the proposals would result in unjustified harm to the character of the Priory Lane part of the St Neots Conservation Area and the significance of the designated heritage assets within it through incongruous changes to the Priory Centre. We are supportive of the principle of the regeneration of the Priory Centre but believe this could be achieved through less visually intrusive design with less harm to the historic environment.

Please note that no further comments have been received from Historic England on the amended plans received 19th August 2024.

- 5.7 HDC Environmental Health With regard to the "Noise Impact Assessment" undertaken by dBx Acoustics Ltd (report reference 23062-R02B-SW, dated 26 February 2024), if minded to grant permission I suggest the recommendations contained within Chapter 5 and 6 of this report be adhered to.
- 5.8 Highway Authority (Cambridgeshire County Council) No objection. While the application does not indicate any increase in provision of off-street parking other than in the form of that for cyclists, I note that the site does benefit from existing parking throughout the town centre. With extensive parking restrictions on the surrounding streets, I consider it unlikely that this proposal will have a detrimental impact on highway safety. The Local Planning Authority should however be satisfied that any additional demand for parking associated with the increased use of this site can be accommodated and will not be displaced onto streets further from the town centre where it could be detrimental to local amenity.

The application includes a Lighting Statement which indicates that improved and new exterior lighting will be added. Any lighting associated directly with the structure of the building rather than illumination of access roads or parking areas is unlikely to have any detrimental impact on the public highway.

The application form indicates that new external signage to improve building wayfinding and access will be provided. No objections in this regard providing all such signing is modest in scale, limited to directing rather than advertising and located clear of the highway.

- 5.9 Archaeology Team (Cambridgeshire County Council) Due to the archaeological potential of the site a further programme of investigation and recording is required in order to provide more information regarding the presence or absence, and condition, of surviving archaeological remains within the development area, and to establish the need for archaeological mitigation of the development as necessary.
- 5.10 Cadent Gas No objection.
- 5.11 Designing Out Crime Team (Cambridgeshire Constabulary) The application has been supported with some comprehensive statements, relating to crime reduction, lighting and parking, having read these documents comments and observations have been put forward for consideration (external lighting, security glazing, windows and doors, bicycle parking facilities, landscaping, homelessness).

6. REPRESENTATIONS

- 6.1 1 objection received from Priory House raising the following matters:
 - Loss of privacy from the proposed Great Hall Dormer design which is directly opposite a bathroom window and rear garden
 - Impact on listed buildings and conservation area The historic character of the setting and the qualities derived from its past use make it very distinctive. This is impacted by the proposals made in the planning application, where consideration to the setting has not been made to an appropriate level.

7. ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:
 - Principle of Development
 - Impact on Heritage Assets
 - Design and Visual Amenity
 - Residential Amenity
 - Highway Safety and Parking
 - Flood Risk and Drainage
 - Biodiversity

Principle of Development

- 7.2 The application site is located in the St Neots Spatial Planning Area. Policy LP7 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal for development on a site which is additional to those allocated in this plan will be supported where it fulfils the policy requirements and is in accordance with other policies.
- 7.3 The proposal is for the extension and refurbishment of an existing community building and St Neots Town Council office. The use of the building would remain in Use Class F2(b) Halls or meeting places for the principal use of the local community as per the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended). As such, it is not considered there would be any conflict with the provisions of Policy LP7.
- 7.4 Policy LP22 of the Local Plan seeks to support local facilities and services to provide for the needs of the local community, which includes public/community halls. Policy LP22 states that a proposal for a new local service or community facility within a built-up area, or the extension of an existing local service or community facility on land immediately adjoining the built-up area, will be supported where it:
 - a, is of a scale to serve local needs:
 - b. comprises up to a maximum of 600m2 net internal floorspace for a main town centre use; and

- c. provides for a new service or facility or it retains or enhances an existing service or facility, including through the provision of premises suitable for mixed use or multiple community functions.
- 7.5 The proposal looks to retain and enhance an existing community facility which is located within the built-up area. The resultant building would include a main hall with stage and changing rooms, 2 smaller halls (Guest Hall and New Hall) and several smaller bookable meeting rooms, a foyer with open workspace and café/bar and offices for St Neots Town Council. It is considered that the above would enable the building to better serve the needs of the community and would facilitate a range of community functions.
- 7.6 The principle of development is therefore supported by Policies LP7 and LP22 of the Local Plan, subject to all other material considerations below.

Design and Visual Amenity

- 7.7 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 A3 of the adopted Neighbourhood Plan states that all development must be designed to a high quality that reinforces local distinctiveness.
- 7.8 Amended plans have been received and reconsulted on during the course of the application. These have sought to address initial concerns from officers relating to the massing and treatment of the two storey extension to the north end of the building, including the height of the parapet and the arrangement and treatment of the roof plant, and the design of the proposed dormer window on the east elevation.

<u>Demolition of single storey extension and replacement two storey</u> extension

7.9 The proposal involves the demolition of the existing single storey St Neots Town Council offices to the north end of the Priory Centre building. The replacement two storey extension would be sited in a similar location however it would have a reduced footprint (130m2) compared to the existing extension (160m2) increasing the size of the river terrace space. The proposed extension would create a New Hall at ground floor with external doors onto the river terrace and an external ramp to the side of the extension and the first floor of the extension would comprise St Neots Town Council offices. There would be internal access to the existing Priory Centre building at ground and first floor.

- 7.10 The amendments to the scheme retain the two-storev height of the extension and roof top plant (with justification for the office accommodation and area of external plant set out in section 3.6 of the Design and Access Statement), however the overall height of the extension has been reduced by 190mm (from 26040mm to 25850mm). The octagonal acoustic louvered plant enclosure is setback a minimum of 1 metre from the edge of the building (with a greater setback at the corners of the octagonal plant) and would protrude approximately 1.9 metres above the parapet wall. It is considered that the setback of the plant enclosure, together with the octagonal form, creates a clear break between the brick parapet and setback plant enclosure which reduces the prominence of the plant and the perceived height and massing of the two-storey extension and improves the relationship with boathouse to the north.
- The proposed external materials of the extension have been 7.11 revised from the previously proposed painted/stained timber cladding to red facing brickwork in stretcher bond. The Urban Design Officer has recommended a lighter coloured plain red brick to form a subtle contrast with the Priory Centre. The proposed parapet of the extension comprises Flemish bond brickwork with two rows of 3 courses of corbelled projecting brickwork above the first-floor windows which reflect the eaves level and corbelled brickwork on the existing Priory Centre. Above this, areas of 'recessed/ projecting/omitted header and alternate brick choice headers' would break up the height of the raised parapet wall and add interest. Panels of recessed red hit and miss brickwork in Flemish bond are proposed adjacent to the first-floor windows to provide natural ventilation to the office spaces. Furthermore, it would visually increase the width of the perceived window openings creating a horizontal emphasis, breaking up areas of blank brickwork and creating a consistent width between brick piers across the first-floor level. The north side elevation includes large tax windows to resemble window openings with hit and miss brick panels adjacent which would break up this blank elevation. A red brick Flemish bond brickwork is proposed for the link element between the proposed extension and the existing building which would create a clear break between the extension and the Priory Centre.
- 7.12 The proposed scale, massing, design and treatment of the proposed two storey extension is supported by the Urban Design Officer in design terms, subject to conditions requiring the facing brick and detailing of the proposed extension and the treatment of the plant enclosure.

Dormer windows

7.13 The proposals include the removal of 6 smaller gable fronted dormer windows (2 on the eastern elevation and 4 on the western elevation) and the introduction of a large full height box

dormer window to the Great Hall on the east elevation. The design rationale for the proposed dormer is to create visual draw to the Priory Centre from the Market Square. Concerns were initially raised by officers regarding the height, bulk and design of the proposed dormer window. The proposed dormer window has since been reduced in height and sits approximately 2.4m below the ridge height of the Priory Centre. The width of the dormer window has been designed to reflect the width of the ground floor entrance and align with the external face of the building. It is considered that the amendments significantly reduce the bulk and massing of the proposed dormer.

First floor extensions

7.14 The proposal also includes a first floor extension to the west elevation overlooking the river which would create two small bookable rooms off the Main Hall internal balcony. A first floor extension on the main (east) elevation would create another 2 bookable rooms, green room and cash register office. The proposed first floor extensions would have a flat roof design in line with the existing eaves of the building and this would complement the flat roof of the two-storey extension to the north. The proposed external material is standing seam metal cladding and it is recommended that the detail, material and finish is secured by way of condition.

Other external alterations

7.15 Other external alterations to the building include a new chimney/extract stack on the east elevation, new and replacement aluminium frame windows and doors on all elevations, a first floor balcony to the west elevation off the Guest Hall, new balustrade along the river terrace and a section of PV panel on the west roof slope. It is not considered these elements of the scheme would have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the existing building. Limited details of hard and soft landscaping have been provided at this stage and it is therefore recommended that these details, including any planting, hard surfaces and boundary treatment, be secured by condition.

Summary

7.16 The existing building is a large structure of limited architectural merit and the proposed contemporary extensions and alterations to the building would create a contrast with the surrounding historic context without appearing unduly prominent. The proposals would enhance the functionality of the community building and incorporate sustainable design and construction methods. The Urban Design Officer has raised no objection to the development, however conditions have been recommended to obtain further details of materials, treatments and finishes. It is

considered that this would ensure a high quality finish to the proposals and on balance it accords with Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Local Plan and Policy A3 of the adopted Neighbourhood Plan in terms of design and visual amenity.

Impact on Heritage Assets

7.17 Policy LP34 of the Local Plan to 2036 sets out that proposals should protect the significance of heritage assets and reflects the statutory protections afforded to heritage assets and their management through the National Planning Policy Framework 2023.

Significance

- 7.18 The application relates to The Priory Centre, a late 20th Century building located on the historic waterfront in St Neots. It lies within the St Neots Conservation Area and close to several designated heritage assets. The scheduled monument 'The Malting (kiln)' is located 20 metres to the east of the north end of the Priory Centre. The kiln functioned as an oast house associated with a brewery which operated on the site in the 19th century. The former brewery building in which the scheduled monument kiln is located is the Grade II listed 'Malthouse behind the Priory Club'.
- 7.19 There are two other Grade II listed buildings located close to the southern end of the application site: Priory House and The Priory. Both are brick-built houses within tiled roofs dating from the early 19th and mid-18th centuries respectively. They are located at the western end of the site of St Neots Priory, the below ground remains of which are designated as a scheduled monument.
- 7.20 The St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment (October 2006) identifies the industrial heritage of the Priory Lane and Riverside area including its former maltings and breweries. It highlights the scale and mass of the buildings and their subdued materials palette as important considerations for the area.
- 7.21 The present building is a modern interpretation of the historic structures that once occupied the site being simple in structure and form, and the building is stepped down to its northern edge to allow the cone of the Malting(kiln) scheduled monument to be visually prominent. The existing building is constructed from brick with a regular pattern of small openings. Whilst it is a large building, the restrained nature of the elevational treatment is such that it is viewed as a foil for other adjacent historic buildings which allows them to be more prominent. The simplicity and prominence of the uninterrupted roof line results in a strong silhouette on the skyline. Furthermore, the views of the riverside

and looking back across the meadows towards this site are considered to be important memorable views which are noted in the Conservation Character Statement. The cone of the Oast House with its landmark shape is prominent in longer distance views across the river meadows from Eaton Socon.

Justification of the proposal

- 7.22 Section 3.6 of the Design & Access statement seeks to justify the proposal, in particular the two-storey extension to the north end of the building including the requirement for plant at roof level. The proposed extension would create a New Hall at ground floor and replacement offices for St Neots Town Council at first floor. The New Hall is designed to accommodate Town Council functions, including planning committees as well as a space for family and community events with access to the river terrace, use of the café servery and a more affordable option than the larger Great Hall and Guest Hall. Various options appear to have been explored including alternative location of the St Neots Town Council offices, not providing the New Hall and fewer smaller bookable rooms however this would impact on the proposed flexibility, turnover and the ability to provide a range of cost points, including free for community service spaces.
- 7.23 The project involves significant plant replacement within the existing building, including to the Great Hall and Guest Hall. The existing loft area of the building is already taken up by existing plant and therefore an additional plant area is required for the new systems including Air Source Heap Pumps (ASHP). This particular plant needs to be in the open air and well-ventilated so it cannot be enclosed within the building. Alternative siting has been explored including the river terrace and service yard. The former would result in loss of riverside amenity area and the latter would impact vehicle movements, deliveries and pedestrian access - both options would be to the detriment of the community use of the building. To screen the proposed plant, it has been enclosed behind acoustic louvres which also serves to protect adjacent residential properties from noise associated with the plant.
- 7.24 Officers are satisfied that the design and rationale of the development has been adequately justified, it therefore falls to be assessed whether the proposal would harm the significance of designated heritage assets.

Impact of the proposal

7.25 As set out in the previous section of the report, the height of the proposed two storey extension to the north end of the building has been reduced in height, the roof plant has been stepped in from the edge of the building and partially concealed behind a parapet. The Conservation Officer has acknowledged these

improvements to the appearance of the building, however it is considered that fundamentally the scale, form and massing of the proposed extension would sit uncomfortably in the street/ river scene. It would detract from the Malting(kiln) scheduled monument and the Grade II listed Malthouse as the only remaining legacy of the industrial development heritage of the site and its relationship to the river. The existing views make a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area. The proposed extension would partially block certain views of the Malting(kiln) cone which would impact the prominence of this historic landmark feature from across the river. It has been demonstrated in Section 4 (Views Study) in the submitted Heritage Statement that the top of the cone would still be visible in views east from Regatta Meadow to above and to the side of the proposed extension. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that the setting of the scheduled monument, the Grade II listed Malthouse and the character and appearance of the wider Conservation Area would be harmed by this aspect of the proposal. A scheduled monument is considered under the NPPF 2023 to be a designated heritage asset of very high significance, as such the harm to the scheduled monument is afforded even greater weight.

- 7.26 The proposed dormer window on the east elevation has been reduced in size and height however it would remain a strong vertical feature within the street scene giving prominence to the Main Hall entrance doors below. It is considered that the scale and massing of the dormer would detract from the proportions and scale of Grade II listed Priory House in views along Priory Lane. The proposed new chimney/extract stack on the eastern roof slope is required as part of the Heating and Ventilation strategy. Due to its siting and dimensions, it would project above the ridge line of the building and appear dominant in certain views of the Malting(kiln) cone and the skyline. Furthermore, the proposed flat roof first floor extension to the Priory Lane frontage would increase the prominence of the building in the street scene and result in slight harm to the appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 7.27 It is considered the first-floor flat roofed extensions to the river frontage would have neutral impact as they would be viewed against the backdrop of the existing building, however the proposed solar panels would be prominent in views from the river meadows and detract from the simple design of the roof.
- 7.28 Overall, it is considered that the proposed changes on the Priory Lane elevation of the building, notably the proposed dormer window, first-floor extension and two storey side extension at the northern end of the building, would be harmful to the character and appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area. Furthermore, the development on the Priory Lane frontage would also detract from the setting and the experience of the Grade II

listed Priory House. It is considered that there would be harm caused to the Grade II listed Malthouse and the Maltings(kiln) scheduled monument as the proposed two storey extension would obscure views of the cone which is local landmark best seen in long distance views across the meadows.

- 7.29 HDC's Conservation Officer has raised an objection to the proposed development on the grounds set out above. Furthermore, Historic England have raised an objection to the unjustified harm to the character of the Priory Lane part of the St Neots Conservation Area and the significance of the designated heritage assets within it. It is however noted that no further comments have been received from Historic England on the amended plans received 19th August 2024. Notwithstanding this, Officers agree with the specialist heritage advice received and it is concluded that the harm to the significance of heritage assets from the proposed development would be less than substantial. The proposal would therefore conflict with the aims of Policy LP34 and the NPPF 2023.
- 7.30 Paragraph 208 of the NPPF 2023 requires where there would be less than substantial harm, for it to be balanced against the public benefits of the scheme. The balancing exercise has been carried out at the end of this report.

<u>Archaeology</u>

- 7.31 Policy LP34 of the Local Plan states that great weight and importance should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, including archaeology.
- 7.32 The Historic Environment Team at Cambridgeshire County Council have been consulted and they have indicated the proposed development area has archaeological potential. It is therefore recommended that the site should be subject to a programme of archaeological investigation secured through the inclusion of a condition. Subject to this, the proposal would comply with Policy LP34 of the Local Plan in this regard.

Residential Amenity

7.33 Policy LP14 of the Local Plan states that 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. Furthermore, the NPPF 2023 states planning decisions should ensure that developments achieve a high standard of amenity for existing users (Paragraph 135) and mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development (Paragraph 191).

7.34 The nearest residential properties are Priory House to the east and 2 Priory Court to the south of the site. An objection was received from the occupant of Priory House regarding loss of privacy during the first round of consultations, however no further comments have been received following re-consultation on the amended plans. It is considered that the key issues to considered are potential loss of privacy and overlooking, and the noise impacts of the development.

Privacy and overlooking

7.35 The proposal includes the introduction of a full height box dormer window to the Great Hall on the east elevation. The proposed first floor plan (295 GA 120 Rev P2) shows a first-floor mezzanine/balcony within the Great Hall. With the first iteration of the scheme, there was concern the first floor viewing area would result in overlooking impacts and loss of privacy to the rear garden of Priory House located approximately 13m to the east and the first floor bathroom window on the property. The proposed elevation drawing (295 GA 141 P2) now indicates the first-floor balcony window would have 'internal fixed timber screening to inner face of glazing to reduce risk of privacy overlooking' (labelled E5). It is recommended that a condition be imposed to obtain details of the treatment and height of the internal timber screening which should extend a minimum 1.7m above the first floor finished floor level and be retained in perpetuity in order to prevent overlooking and loss of privacy to the occupants of Priory House. Similar screening is proposed for the south facing corner window to the Bookable Room G1.13 shown on the proposed first floor plan (295 GA 120 Rev P2). Details of this should also be secured by way of condition.

Noise

7.36 The application is accompanied by a Noise Impact Assessment dBx Acoustics Ltd (reference 23062-R02B-SW). This report presents the results of an environmental noise survey carried out at the site and provides guidance on the acoustic requirements for the external envelope, glazing and ventilation of the building. Potential sources of noise which could impact on neighbouring amenity relate to the use of amplified speech or music in the Great Hall. Guest Hall and New Hall as well as the proposed plant. Recommendations within the Noise Impact Assessment include limiting internal noise levels and acoustic upgrades to the Great Hall building envelope. Mitigation has also been recommended in the form of duct silencers and acoustic plant louvres such that all plant in operation does not exceed the typical background noise level at existing commercial receptors (Library, Oast House), and is more than 10dB below the typical background noise level at the residential receptors. This has been reviewed by HDC's Environmental Health Officer and no objection has been raised, however a condition is recommended

should Members be minded to approve the application to ensure the recommendations contained within Chapter 5 and 6 of the Noise Impact Assessment are adhered to. It is acknowledged that the increased capacity of the building would result in additional comings and goings, however this would not be so significant compared to the existing use of the building that there would be a material adverse impact on neighbour residential properties. Lastly, given the proximity to residential properties, it is recommended that a condition be imposed to control construction and demolition hours and associated collections/deliveries to the site.

<u>Summary</u>

7.37 Overall, subject to the conditions recommended above, it is not considered the proposed development would have unacceptable detrimental impact on nearby properties and therefore the proposal accords with Policy LP14 of the Local Plan.

Highway Safety and Parking

- 7.38 Policy LP16 of the Local Plan looks to ensure that developers fully consider how the opportunities and impacts of the range of travel and transport modes are addressed in their proposals. Policy LP17 of the Local Plan sets out that a proposal will be supported where it incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates accessibility for service and emergency vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles.
- 7.39 The application is supported by a Transport Statement and Parking Provision Statement produced by the applicant's agent (AOC) dated February 2024.
- The site is located in the centre of St Neots and is accessible by foot, cycle and public transport. There are also several public car parks within the vicinity of the site including St Anselm Place Priory Car Park, Priory Lane Car Park, Tan Yard Car Park and Waitrose Car Park which cumulatively have a capacity of 288 spaces as set out in the applicant's Parking Provision Statement. The proposal looks to increase the floor area of the building by approximately 400m2, however it is understood that this would not significantly increase the building capacity beyond its current designed capacity. For instance, the existing Great Hall has a standing capacity of approximately 650 and theatrical sit-down performances hold an audience of approximately 370 and the proposed reconfiguration and extension of the building would raise the capacity of the Great Hall to 430 for seated performances. It is considered that any additional demand for car parking associated with the proposals could be satisfactorily accommodated within existing public car parks in close proximity to the site and it would not displace parking onto streets further

from the town centre. Furthermore, the Highway Authority has raised no objection. With extensive parking restrictions on the surrounding streets, it is considered unlikely that the proposal would have a detrimental impact on highway safety.

- 7.41 The Highway Authority has raised no in principle objection the applicant's Lighting Statement provided and it is not considered that the provision of external lighting to the building would have adverse highway safety impacts. The applicant has confirmed that no signage or lighting would be sited on the highway. Notwithstanding this, it is recommended that a detailed lighting scheme be secured by way of condition and an informative should be added to any decision to advise the applicant that a separate advertisement consent is likely to be required.
- 7.42 With the above, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on highway safety and accords with Policy LP17 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Policy PT1 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 7.43 Policy LP5 of the Local Plan sets out that a proposal will only be supported where all forms of flood risk have been addressed. Furthermore, Policies LP6 and LP15 set out the Council's approach to wastewater and surface water management.
- 7.44 The site is predominantly within Flood Zone 2 on the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning and a section of the site falls within Flood Zone 3b (Functional Flood Plain) in Huntingdonshire's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2017). A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Strategy has been submitted with the application.
- 7.45 The existing Priory Centre building covers the majority of the site, with the remaining areas consisting of hardstanding areas. The proposal includes a replacement extension to the north end of the building and infill extensions on the front and rear elevation. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF 2023 sets out that minor development including small non-residential extensions (with a footprint of less than 250m2) should not be subject to the sequential or exception tests. The proposal is considered to be minor development and therefore the sequential and exception tests are not required in this instance.
- 7.46 In accordance with paragraph 173 of the NPPF 2023, development should only be allowed in areas at risk of flooding where it can be demonstrated that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. The submitted FRA demonstrates that there would be no loss of flood storage capacity for the lifetime of the development and even increases the flood storage volume in the 100-year return period due to the reduced footprint of the

replacement extension to the north end of the building. The Environment Agency have raised no objection on this basis as well as the finished floor levels being set at 16.32mAOD. A condition is recommended to ensure compliance with the FRA mitigation measures. The FRA also recommends flood resilience and resistance measures which could be incorporated into the building design and it is recommended that final details of these measures should be secured by way of condition. Similarly, it is recommended that a detailed flood evacuation plan as recommended in section 6.2 of the FRA is conditioned.

- 7.47 In terms of surface water drainage, the existing arrangements are to be reused whereby surface water drainage that runs along the eastern and northern boundaries discharges to the River Great Ouse. The proposed roof area of the two storey extension would be served by traditional downpipes which would drain to the existing surface water drain. There will be no increase in surface water run-off flows as a result of the development. The Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA) has removed their initial objection on this basis and therefore the proposed approach to surface water drainage is considered acceptable, subject to conditions requiring the detailed drainage design and details of drainage during the construction phase as recommended by the LLFA.
- 7.48 Subject to the conditions outlined above, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in terms of flood risk and drainage meeting the aims and objectives of Policies LP5, LP6 and LP15 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan and the NPPF 2023.

Biodiversity

- 7.49 Policy LP30 of the Local Plan requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible. Paragraph 180 of the NPPF (2023) states planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.
- 7.50 The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (reference A1128.003) prepared by Crossman Associates. The building is in an urban area and surrounded by hardstanding, however it is adjacent to the River Great Ouse to the west. The PEA concludes that there are no significant features suitable for roosting bats and the proposals are unlikely to affect any other protected species. Recommendations and precautionary measures have been put forward in Section 4 of the PEA which include a precautionary approach to be taken in relation to bats, sensitive clearance of vegetation with regard to birds, install bird boxes on the exterior of the new development and reduced external lighting to benefit nocturnal wildlife. It is

- also recommended that a Construction Ecological Management Plan be produced, particularly as the site lies adjacent to the river in interests of avoiding watercourse contamination during the construction phase.
- 7.51 Subject to conditions identified above, as well as a condition requiring details of soft landscaping, it is considered the proposal would protect and enhance ecological features and therefore accords with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan.

Conclusion and Planning Balance

- 7.52 In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, all planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 7.53 The proposal is for the refurbishment and extension of The Priory Centre which is an existing community building and St Neots Town Council offices. The principle of development is supported by Policies LP7 and LP22 of the Local Plan.
- 7.54 By virtue of the design, scale and massing of the proposals, notably the proposed dormer window and first-floor flat roof extension on the east elevation and two storey side extension at the northern end of the building, it is considered that the proposals would result in harm to the character and appearance of the Priory Lane part of the St Neots Conservation Area and the significance of the designated heritage assets within it, including a scheduled monument and listed buildings. The harm to the significance of heritage assets from the proposed development would be less than substantial, as such there would be conflict with the aims of Policy LP34 and the NPPF 2023. The proposal would therefore result in both environmental harm to the historic environment, and social harm through its impacts on people's experience and views of cone of the Malthouse(kiln) from Regatta Meadows. In accordance with, paragraph 208 of the NPPF 2023, where there would be less than substantial harm to heritage assets, there is a requirement for this to be balanced against the public benefits of the scheme.
- 7.55 The justification for the proposed development has been set out in the submitted Design & Access statement. The building currently runs at a commercial loss, poor fabric performance and many systems require replacement/upgrading. It is acknowledged that the interior of the building is somewhat dated

and is in need of alteration and refurbishment to bring it up to modern standards. The proposal looks to improve on and deliver additional bookable rooms/spaces of varying sizes for flexible use, including community events/groups, conference hire, family events (weddings and parties) and a wide range of performance (theatre, music and comedy). The Design & Access statements sets out that having a healthy range of smaller and larger spaces has proved vital in the successful operations of other community facilities. It is therefore considered that the continued and enhanced community use of the building is a public benefit which can be attributed significant weight. This would support the social objective of the NPPF 2023 which looks to support communities' health, social and cultural well-being (paragraph 8).

- 7.56 Furthermore, the proposal incorporates low carbon energy solutions, including air source heat pumps and solar panels which is considered to be an environmental benefit of the scheme which can be given moderate weight.
- 7.57 Lastly, there would be economic benefit of the development process itself, including sourcing of materials and construction jobs and it would retain existing employment associated with the centre which can be given moderate weight.
- 7.58 As set out earlier within the report, several conditions are recommended to secure samples of materials, architectural details and other finishes which would ensure that the development achieves a high-quality finish.
- 7.59 It should be noted that not all proposed developments are entirely without harm or entirely without benefit. Therefore, in reaching a recommendation on the application, the potential harm of the development has been considered against the benefits of the proposed development. As set out above, different weight has been given to each material consideration to form the overall planning balance. Accordingly, the cumulative benefits of the proposed development would be of sufficient magnitude to outweigh the less than substantial harm found to designated heritage assets. Having regard to all relevant material considerations, it is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted.
- 8. RECOMMENDATION APPROVAL subject to conditions to include the following:
 - Time limit

- Approved plans
- Materials samples
- Architectural Details
- · Hard and soft landscaping
- Details of PV panels
- Details of balustrades/gates
- Details of internal window screening
- Archaeology
- Compliance with Noise Impact Assessment
- External lighting scheme
- Compliance with FRA
- Flood resistance and reliance measures
- Flood evacuation plan
- Surface water drainage design
- Details of drainage during construction
- Construction hours
- Delivery hours during construction

If you would like a translation of this document, a large text version or an audio version, please contact us on 01480 388388 and we will try to accommodate your needs

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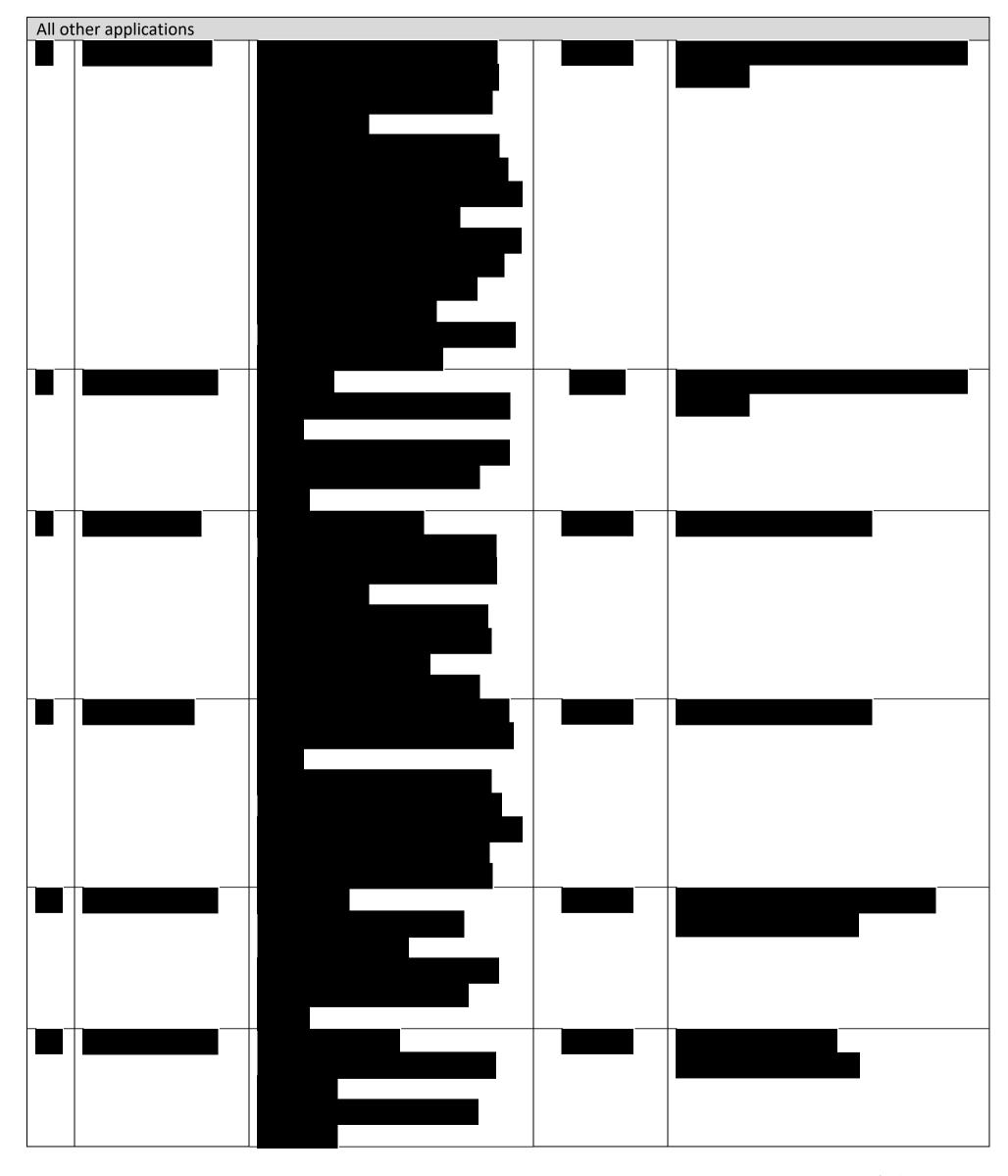


No. Reference Development SNTC Decision Notes

The following application/s are for listed building consent							
			SUPPORT	Technical exercise and should be subject to the Conservation Officers approval			
The following application/s are in a conservation area							
S3	24/00515/HDC	Priory Centre Priory Lane St Neots Refurbishment and extension of existing community building and town council offices to include demolition of existing single storey extension and replacement two-storey extension with screened plant at roof level, first floor extensions to east and west elevations, glazed dormer window to east elevation, creation of external ramps and steps, canopies over entrances, glazed ground floor link extension on west elevation, installation of solar panels, replacement chimney, new balcony to west elevation, alterations to balustrade on riverside and replacement fenestration and doors.	NOTED	Members noted the application.			
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No.	Reference	Development	SNTC Decision	Notes				
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Development Management Committee Application Ref: 24/00515/HDC

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