

Urban Design Comments

To	██████████
From	██████████ Principal Urban Design Officer, Hertsmere Borough Council
Status	Full Application (s. 62A)
Date	08/09/2026

Proposal	Partial demolition of existing buildings (with retention of existing two-storey car park and substation) and redevelopment of the site to provide a mixed-use development comprising residential apartments (class C3) and flexible commercial floorspace (class E) across 4 blocks and associated internal roads, parking, drainage, landscaping, amenity space and associated works.
Reference	S62A/2026/0159
Location	Maple House, Nos 8-16 (even) & 30-32 High Street and nos 1-7 Princes Parade, EN6 5BA

Site Layout

- 1.1 Proposals for “external alterations to facade and fenestration, removal of rooftop plant enclosure, and associated landscaping works” were approved under 26/0764/FUL. This permission sits as an island site within the wider redevelopment proposed under the subject application that forms the basis of this advice.
- 1.2 Under the subject application, the existing multistorey car park within the north-east portion of the site and the existing substation are also proposed to be retained. The fragmented approach to permissions on the site, combined with the desired retention of car parking infrastructure, present considerable constraints to a successful and comprehensive redevelopment. As a result, proposals fail to meaningfully integrate the retained assets and extant permission with the subject proposals to form a cohesive and seamless site strategy. It is notable that comprehensive redevelopment of the site is highlighted as a key opportunity within the candidate site allocation.
- 1.3 Public/private delineation, wayfinding and circulation:
 - 1.3.1 The space enclosed by Blocks A, B and the retained Canada Life Place building is noted as a ‘semi-private residents’ courtyard with access limited by planting’. This space is flanked by private entrances to the residential units and secondary (service) commercial access. Given that this space forms a key desire line through the site from High Street to Mutton Lane and to the food store to the west of the site, it is inappropriate for this space to be designed in a way that dissuades public use.
 - 1.3.2 The ‘semi-private’ design of this space also impacts negatively on the proposed Neighbourhood Square. For the Neighbourhood Square to function meaningfully, it should draw people from the busy High Street and guide them through the site. Intuitive wayfinding through the site is not achieved under the current proposals because of conflicts with the proposed turning head and the exclusionary design of the landscape space described above. As a result, a noisy Neighbourhood Square adjacent to the main road and surrounded by road infrastructure on all

sides is proposed. Users would be expected to turn back and leave the square onto High Street – rather than progressing through the site.

- 1.3.3 Retention of the Canada Life Place building limits opportunities to improve the setting of the grade-II listed public house opposite. Outlook across High Street would be to the new Neighbourhood Square and surrounding service road infrastructure, and onwards to the corner of the Canada Life Place building. This represents a missed opportunity to repair the built environment in this key location, and to create well-designed permeability through to the north-south link back to The Walk.
- 1.3.4 Placement of the central service road between Canada Life Place and the retained vehicle ramp creates an extremely infrastructure heavy central route from High Street to the proposed north-south connection to The Walk. As a result, pedestrians would be dissuaded from using this route. The combination of the above factors points to failure of TR4 of the NPPF on all points from a-d.
- 1.3.5 The space enclosed by the proposed Block E and the retained car park is now proposed to be gated. Introduction of hard boundaries adds to an exclusionary and unsafe feel and does not follow best practice. Hertsmere's Design Guide Part D is explicit on this point, stating that "Gated developments can create a sense of segregation, increase fear and perception of crime and will be resisted by the Council." [3e.) ii) d.]
- 1.3.6 A narrow, dead-end alleyway is created between the retained car park and the proposed Block D. This space is not overlooked on either side and hosts external bike storage, which will become a magnet for crime. The alleyway terminates at the rear of the retained substation. This space is unsafe, and complies with neither Secured by Design guidance nor NPPF guidance on designing with groups vulnerable to crime or the fear of crime, such as women and girls. It is noted that a gate to this route is proposed, but this does not improve the amenity of the alleyway, and does not provide security for vulnerable groups against other residents, their guests, tailgaters or the gate being left unlocked. It is best practice to design out these types of spaces from the outset, and this site offered an opportunity to do so.
- 1.3.7 Support for Active Travel
- 1.3.8 A key opportunity of the site was to provide a well-designed link to The Walk. This would enhance permeability and provide a positive connection back to the nearby train station – celebrating the sustainability of this location and encouraging active travel. However, the primary entrance to the road running along the western boundary to the site is now lined by cycle stores, bin stores and a substation at ground level. This creates an unappealing entrance to the site from Mutton Lane. The prevalence of parked cars along this route worsens the appearance of this route. Upgrades to the surface are only proposed within the redline – no upgrades to this route from the redline back to The Walk are proposed. During the pre-app process, it was suggested that the applicant should reach out to third party land owners in order to secure upgrades in this area,
- 1.3.9 There was an opportunity to set development back from High Street and Mutton Lane, and to improve public realm for pedestrians and cyclists. These users are poorly supported by the current car-dominant infrastructure. Walking and wheeling at the perimeter of the site and beyond the redline has not been considered through the proposals. This would've also improved opportunities for spill-out spaces – particularly with regard to the shop units proposed top the ground floor of Block D, which are proposed to sit in very close proximity to the existing layby.

- 1.3.9.1 As above, connections along the western boundary to The Walk are critical in terms of linking the site to the train station. By directing pedestrians and cyclists to the western route, which is used by service vehicles and residents, it cannot be fairly concluded that active travel to the station is encouraged through the proposals.
- 1.3.9.2 There is a bus stop on High Street, directly in front of the site. At pre-app, discussions centred around the re-imagining of the vehicle layby in order to create more meaningful public realm and improve arrival by public transport. These considerations do not appear in the proposals. The council's emerging Vision documents highlight ways in which these laybys can be re-purposed to improve public realm.
- 1.3.9.3 Entrance/exit points to the campus are shown to be from High Street and Mutton Lane – neither of which present safe crossing points for onward journeys

Form & Scale

- 2.1 The principle of greater height is supported on this site. The expectation is, however, that tall buildings are of exemplary architectural quality and that the comprehensive redevelopment of this key landmark site sets the tone for the wider regeneration of Potters Bar.
- 2.2 The 15-storey Block A tower is proposed to be the tallest building on the site. It remains unclear what this tower is landmarking, and what its role is in the wider townscape. The current proposals create an uninviting entrance to the site at the base of the tower to its west, and lead only to 'semi-private' space to the east. It is peculiar to strongly mark an entrance/gateway that leads only to semi-private space and that pays limited attention to the quality of ground-level activities.
- 3.1 The silhouette of Block A does not provide sufficient interest on the skyline. It adopts a stark, blocky form which stops abruptly at the top. Efforts have been made to add some detail to the crown of this building. However, these are considered too timid as the proposed brick detailing is unlikely to be legible in distant views. The surrounding vernacular does not host flat-roofed buildings, so shaped/profiled parapet designs were discussed at pre-app in order to add sculptural qualities to the design and improve its reading from afar. These ideas have not been adopted in the proposals.
- 2.3 Profiled corners to the buildings soften the buildings to some extent. This move is welcomed.
- 2.4 Various identities are defined by the built form – a tower (block A), the existing Canada Life Place building, a corner-turn block (Block B), a parade (Block D) and 'townhouses' (Block E). Whilst façade treatments help to unite blocks B and D, the remainder of the development reads as a cluster of competing built forms that fail to read as a cohesive campus.
- 2.5 Outline permission was sought for Land South of Potters Bar under 24/1101/OUTEI, and subsequently allowed at appeal. The TVIA shows significant visibility from this development. If this site is to come forward in line with the approved parameters, there will be non-trivial impacts on the proposed public open spaces. This should be assessed.

Appearance & Materiality

- 3.2 Light buff brick is proposed to Block A, with red brick proposed to Blocks B, C, D and E. These materials are typically robust and suited to the local palette. However, it is

difficult to see how the blocks proposed under the subject application integrate successfully with consented proposals for Canada Life Place.

- 3.3 Block A has a vertical expression, with grey brick spandrels used to create a double-height reading to the façade. This helps to manage the scale of the building, but contrasts with the approach taken to the remainder of the subject application, and that taken in respect of Canada Life Place. A simple change in brick colour would have better united this building, which now risks appearing as an unrelated, standalone tower. If the application is to proceed, samples of both bricks should be requested via condition. Brighter/warmer tones are preferred.
- 3.4 Block A suggests a double-height non-residential space at its base. However, residential accommodation is proposed at first floor level. Generous, double height/mezzanine non-residential units would better suit the scale of this tower and give greater flexibility to prospective commercial tenants.
- 3.5 Ground floor entrances to the residential units would also benefit from double-height lobbies. The current arrangement is cramped and the entrances are not clearly identifiable. Given the number of units proposed within Block A, a commensurate scale for residential lobbies is expected.
- 3.6 Block B now adopts some variation to its roofline. At pre-app it was suggested that the characterful interwar roof profile of the existing parade was re-interpreted for this row. Some attempt at this has been made, and the proportions of this building now appear closer to that of the existing shops that would be lost under this application. However, limited attention has been paid to shopfront designs and more could be done with the roof profile.
- 3.7 Block B reads as a continuation of this row, but is markedly more austere. Given that this is accompanied by a step up in scale, a greater richness of detailing would ordinarily be expected.
- 3.8 The retained car park is detrimental to the overall layout, as discussed at length during the pre-app process. In a highly sustainable location, there is no established need for such high parking quantum. In fact, this runs against broader national efforts to promote modal shift. A greater number of car club spaces and better on and off-site provision for walking and wheeling would've averted the need for so much car parking and allowed for better public realm and more efficient use of the site. More positive integration of the bus stop would also have helped, as discussed.
- 3.9 The retained carpark will also have a negative impact of the landscaped area proposed to its west, and the proposed Block D to its east. Painting the façade and adding mesh to existing openings may worsen its appearance. Painted brick requires routine maintenance, whilst unpainted brick does not. Over-cladding of this building was discussed at pre-app, but this has not been adopted in the proposals. There is a missed opportunity to better integrate this building with the wider campus. As vines are now proposed to improve one of the façades, their maintenance and replacement in the event of failure should be conditioned. The vines are unlikely to fully disguise the façade, but may introduce challenges in terms of re-painting the brickwork behind.
- 3.10 Pergolas are proposed to the roof of the retained car park. This is an attempt to improve outlook from Block D – which suffers from poor outlook towards the main road, and similarly poor outlook over the roof of the retained carpark. These structures are unlikely to mask the impact of parked cars in view of the proposed flats. Periodic maintenance will be required to the proposed timber canopies. There is a missed opportunity to positively integrate the car park into the proposals – perhaps by converting the top deck into a roof garden, as discussed at pre-app.

- 3.11 The east elevation of the retained carpark presents a façade comprising painted brick and mesh-openings to the alleyway highlighted earlier. This adds to the hostility of this space.
- 3.12 The 'plant zone' to the north of the retained car park is not shown on the elevations. The design of these elements should be clarified.

Internal amenity, privacy and outlook

- 4.1 East-facing units in Block D directly overlook the layby and busy High Street beyond. Setting the building back may have provided opportunities for street greening – improving outlook from these units and reducing noise intrusion.
- 4.2 West-facing views from Block D are directly over the retained carpark. As above, there may have been scope to demolish this builder in favour of a more efficient use of the site, or to incorporate a roof garden above the retained carpark. Pergolas are proposed atop the retained carpark. It may be difficult to train vines horizontally across the tops of these structures to adequately screen elevated views to the top deck of car parking. The landscape strategy expressly notes that plants are not intended to cover the tops to any meaningful extent, as this would increase wind loads.
Noise intrusion and light pollution from vehicle movements on the top deck may also be problematic. Overall, the placement of Block D results in poor outlook and poor quality external amenity in respect of both primary elevations.
- 4.3 East and south-facing views from Block B are towards High Street and Mutton Lane. This is an extremely busy junction. Again, more generous setbacks and enhanced public realm would have helped.
- 4.4 Defensible planting is proposed adjacent to the ground floor units of Block E to defend privacy to these units. In respect of the retained Canada Life Place building, privacy hedging is proposed to mitigate the impact of the wider development on future occupiers of the proposed ground floor units. This hedging sits extremely close to the building and will, therefore, not function adequately. If such hedging is placed directly in front of windows it will block light to the units and views out. If it is not placed in front of windows then the wider development will have an unacceptable impact on privacy. Impacts on the retained Canada Life Place building are further worsened by the incorporation of the central service road, which runs in close proximity to ground floor windows.
- 4.5 Double beds are shown on the proposed studio unit plans for Block A. These do not comply with the Nationally Described Space Standards, which require a minimum 50sq.m for a 1b2p, single-storey unit.

Landscape and external amenity

- 5.1 Areas of public open space are very limited across the site. The landscape offer is almost entirely for the exclusive use of future residents. There was an opportunity to create more generously-landscaped public routes through the site, as well as meaningful areas for rest and recreation away from the busy main roads.
- 5.2 It is noted that the north-south road is considered within the public open space offer. It is unlikely that this surface would offer opportunities beyond vehicular movements and should therefore not be included in these calculations.
- 5.3 It is positive to see attention to topography, with mounded elements incorporated within the proposed landscape. This helps to create a more dynamic landscape, with

areas that envelope users. As above, it is a shame to gate many of these areas and/or dissuade their use by the wider public.

- 5.4 Whilst permeability through the site is technically provided, the presence of private spaces impact legibility of these routes, and conflicts with vehicles negatively impact their amenity. This is likely to lead to an underutilisation of these new routes, and the sense that non-residents should not enter the development. This is in conflict with TR4 of the NPPF (Street Design, Access and Parking)

Servicing

- 6.1 As noted, servicing of the development creates significant conflicts with the central east-west route and the proposed new Neighbourhood Square. If this application is to progress, vehicle movements should be time-restricted by condition to ensure that these conflicts do not exist at key times. The existence of the hard road surface to within the square limits its utility
- 6.2 Bin and bike stores are placed along some key frontages – such as along the entrance to the site from Mutton Lane.

Energy & Sustainability

- 7.1 Car club spaces could be used to better effect. Conservatively, one car club space may remove the need for 20 conventional spaces.
- 7.2 Cycling is not well supported, as off site networks are not intended to be improved under this application
- 7.3 There is a missed opportunity to improve arrival by bus to the site.
- 7.4 Rooftop PV should be incorporated in the proposals, as this is unlikely to be retrofitted on flatted developments.
- 7.5 The Sustainability Statement notes that a number of bedrooms do not meet acceptable noise levels owing to their proximity to major roads. This means that windows are required to be shut over night and additional ventilation systems provided. It is likely that this could have been designed out with a more comprehensive approach to the site. External spaces facing these major roads will also suffer significant noise intrusion.