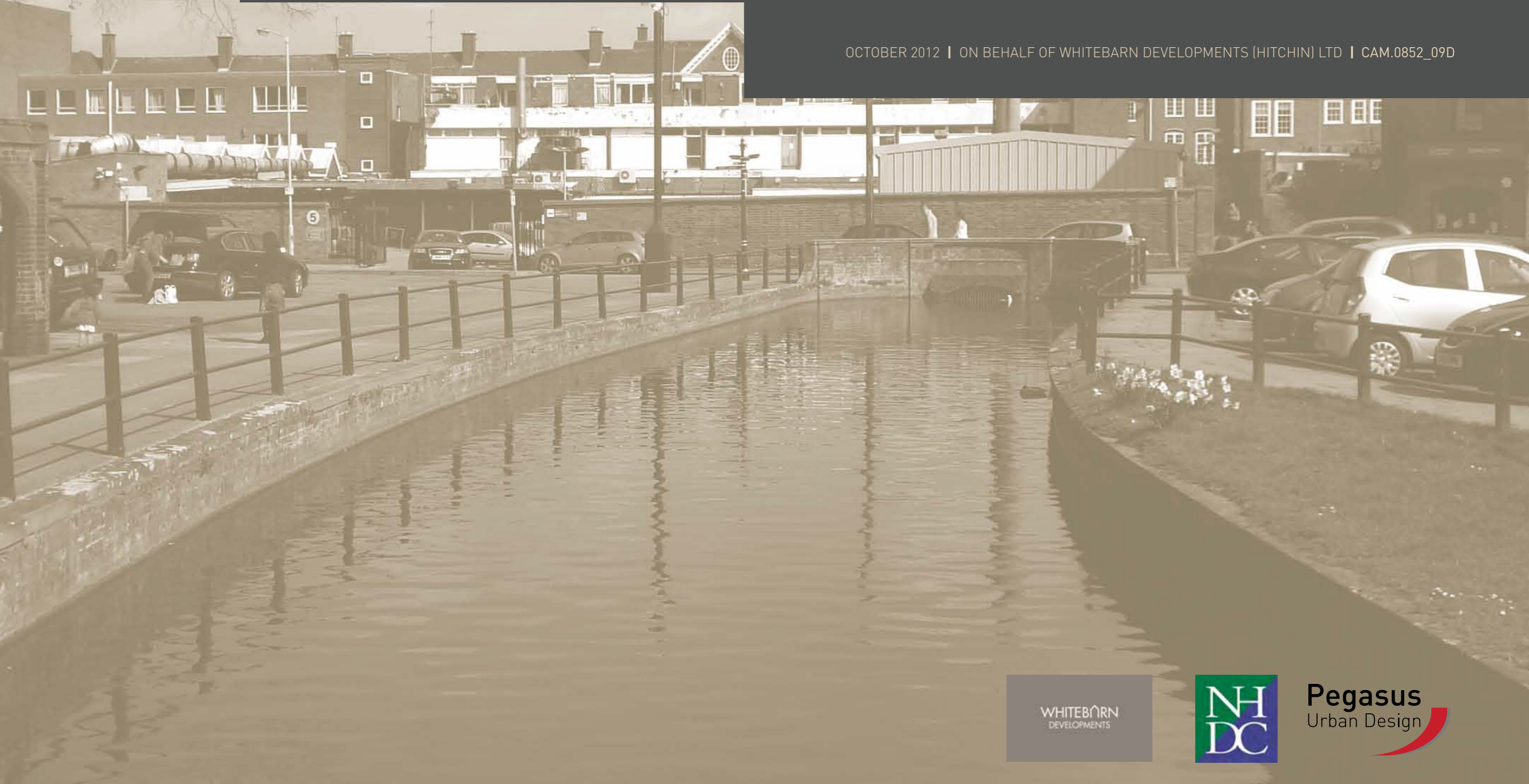


FORMER ROYAL MAIL DELIVERY OFFICE, HERMITAGE ROAD, HITCHIN

DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

OCTOBER 2012 | ON BEHALF OF WHITEBARN DEVELOPMENTS (HITCHIN) LTD | CAM.0852_09D



WHITEBARN
DEVELOPMENTS



Pegasus
Urban Design

“THE GOVERNMENT ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE DESIGN OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT. GOOD DESIGN IS A KEY ASPECT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, IS INDIVISIBLE FROM GOOD PLANNING, AND SHOULD CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TO MAKING PLACES BETTER FOR PEOPLE.”

“IT IS IMPORTANT TO PLAN POSITIVELY FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR ALL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES AND WIDER AREA DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES.” (para. 56 & 57, NPPF 2012)

CONTENTS

PAGE 05 PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT	PAGE 07 ASSESSMENT	PAGE 17 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT	PAGE 23 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS
PAGE 25 LAND USE DISPOSITION	PAGE 26 DESIGN PRINCIPLES	PAGE 30 DESIGN PROPOSALS	PAGE 37 SUMMARY



Pegasus Urban Design
Pegasus House
Querns Business Centre
Whitworth Road
Cirencester
GL7 1RT
www.pegasuspg.co.uk | T 01285 641717 | F 01285 642348

Prepared by Pegasus Urban Design & Whitebarn Developments (Hitchin) Ltd
Pegasus Urban Design is part of Pegasus Planning Group
Prepared on behalf of North Hertfordshire District Council
October 2012 Project code CAM.0852_09D
Contact: Urban Design - Chris Walker

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NOTE: this document is designed to be viewed as A3 double sided.



1: PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document has been prepared by Pegasus Urban Design for Whitebarn Developments (Hitchin) Ltd on behalf of North Hertfordshire District Council.
- 1.2 The vision for the Royal Mail Delivery Office is to redevelop the site and help ensure a sustainable long term future for this important area in the Town Centre of Hitchin.
- 1.3 Policy 22 of the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy 2004 states that 'The Council, working together with potential developers and landowners, will prepare Planning Briefs for the following key development sites in accordance with the aims and policy guidance set out in the this Town Centre Strategy' including The Post Office site.
- 1.4 This document provides guidance on how the site could be developed, providing integration with the existing urban fabric and linkages to existing public transport. This document will provide North Hertfordshire District Council with a design led approach into how this brownfield site could be redeveloped.
- 1.5 The development framework plans within this document are not detailed masterplans. They are designed to be flexible enough to enable detailed options to be explored.
- 1.6 The Draft Development Brief was subject to a six week public consultation which ran from Monday 13th August to Tuesday 25th September 2012. The Developer Whitebarn Developments, was pleased with the good turnout at the exhibition and welcomed the opportunity to engage with the local community on a collective, and where possible, a one-to-one basis. In total 69 responses were received and a total of 92 people attended the exhibition. Consideration was given to all comments received through the public consultation exercise and as a consequence a number of changes have been made to the Development Brief outlined below. (Please refer to the Statement of Consultation for full consultation details).
 - The decision has been taken to continue with Land Use Disposition Option 1 rather than Option 2 as it is necessary to provide an active frontage through the possible mixed uses along Hermitage Road and residential development would be better positioned fronting Portmill Lane and the River Hiz.
 - Variation has also been made to the maximum building heights. The buildings adjacent to the River Hiz Walkway have been reduced to a maximum of three storeys but still allowing the possibility for a four storey landmark building on the corner of Portmill Lane and the River Hiz Walkway. It will be necessary to increase the depth of the 4 storey building at the centre of the site to give additional flexibility for the mix of uses proposed to front Hermitage Road.
 - In response to concern for the setting of the Listed Buildings 7 and 8 Portmill Lane, there will not be any built development adjacent the Listed Buildings.
- 1.7 Alongside relevant national and local policies that need consideration, the brief has also been prepared in accordance with current urban design guidance and best practice.
- 1.8 This document achieves this with the following sections:
 - SECTION 1 - Purpose of the Document**
 - SECTION 2 - Assessment**
 - SECTION 3 - Planning Policy Context**
 - SECTION 4 - Opportunities And Constraints**
 - SECTION 5 - Land Use Disposition**
 - SECTION 6 - Design Principles**
 - SECTION 7 - Design Proposals**
 - SECTION 8 - Summary**



SITE LOCATION PLAN

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2: ASSESSMENT

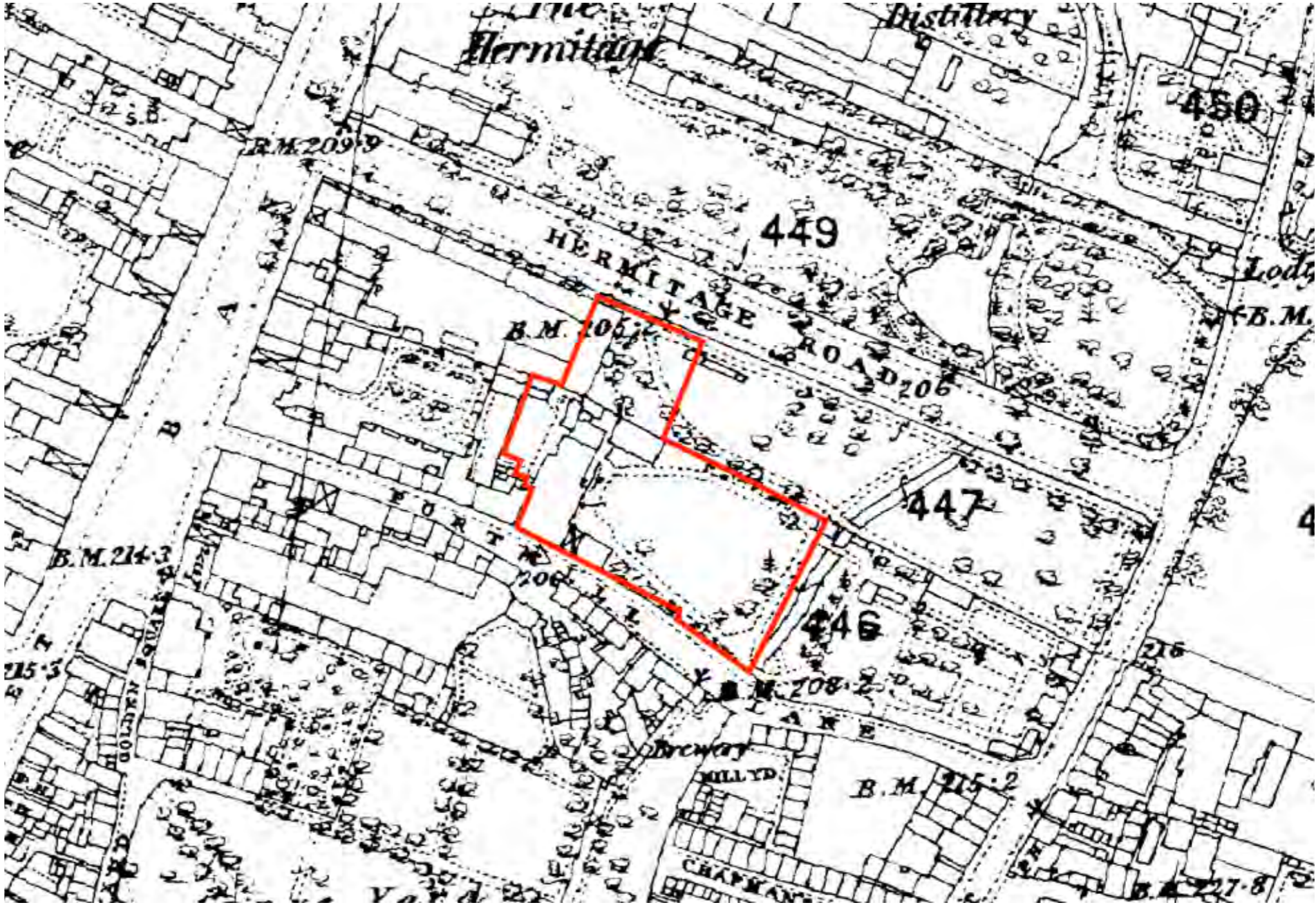
THE SITE

- 2.1 The Royal Mail's Delivery Office, located on 90 Hermitage Road occupies a prime location within the main shopping area of Hitchin. The site is within walking distance of local services and amenities including shops, doctors, dentist, sports facilities, supermarkets and various schools.
- 2.2 The site location plan opposite locates the site within its context. At present the Royal Mail Delivery Office fronts onto Hermitage Road whilst the site is accessed from the rear via Portmill Lane.
- 2.3 The northern boundary of the site is defined by Hermitage Road which accommodates a number of local shops and services. The site boundary does not include the block of shops and flats east and adjacent to the Delivery Office.
- 2.4 The eastern boundary of the site is framed by an existing walkway which connects Portmill Lane with Hermitage Road. Running adjacent to the existing walkway is the River Hiz, although this section of the river is partially culverted. The River Hiz opens up south of the site (see Photo below) through the Portmill Lane car park running parallel to the St Mary's Church. The southern boundary of the site fronts onto the Portmill Lane car park and St Mary's Church.
- 2.5 The western boundary of the site is encompassed by built form. At the northern extent a 4 storey mixed use block adjoins the Royal Mail Delivery Office, whilst to the south a 2.5 storey listed building provides an attractive context for redevelopment.
- 2.6 It should be noted that the site is located within the Hitchin Town Centre Conservation Area and there is a Grade II listed building, 7-8 Portmill Lane, adjacent to the site, whilst the location of the Grade I listed St Mary's Parish Church means that the site forms part of its wider setting. The demolition or substantial demolition of any building greater than 115 cubic metres and of the wall that forms the southern boundary of the site (as it abuts the highway and is over 1 metre in height) will need conservation area consent. In addition an application for this site will need to be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement and a Heritage Statement.



HISTORY OF HITCHIN

- 2.7 The town name of Hitchin originally derives from the small river which runs through the centre of Hitchin adjacent to the site, the River Hiz. Contrary to how most people pronounce the letter 'z' originally it was an abbreviation of the sound 'tch'. Hence it would have been pronounced the River Hitch.
- 2.8 St Mary's Church, which is situated south of the Royal Mail Delivery Office is the largest parish church in Hertfordshire and the tower dates back to 1190.
- 2.9 The town of Hitchin flourished on the wool trade during the 17th century and by the time the London to York Great Northern Railway was built in the 19th century Hitchin had become a far more accessible market town. Soon after the corn exchange was built in the market place and within a short time Hitchin had established itself as a major centre for grain trading.

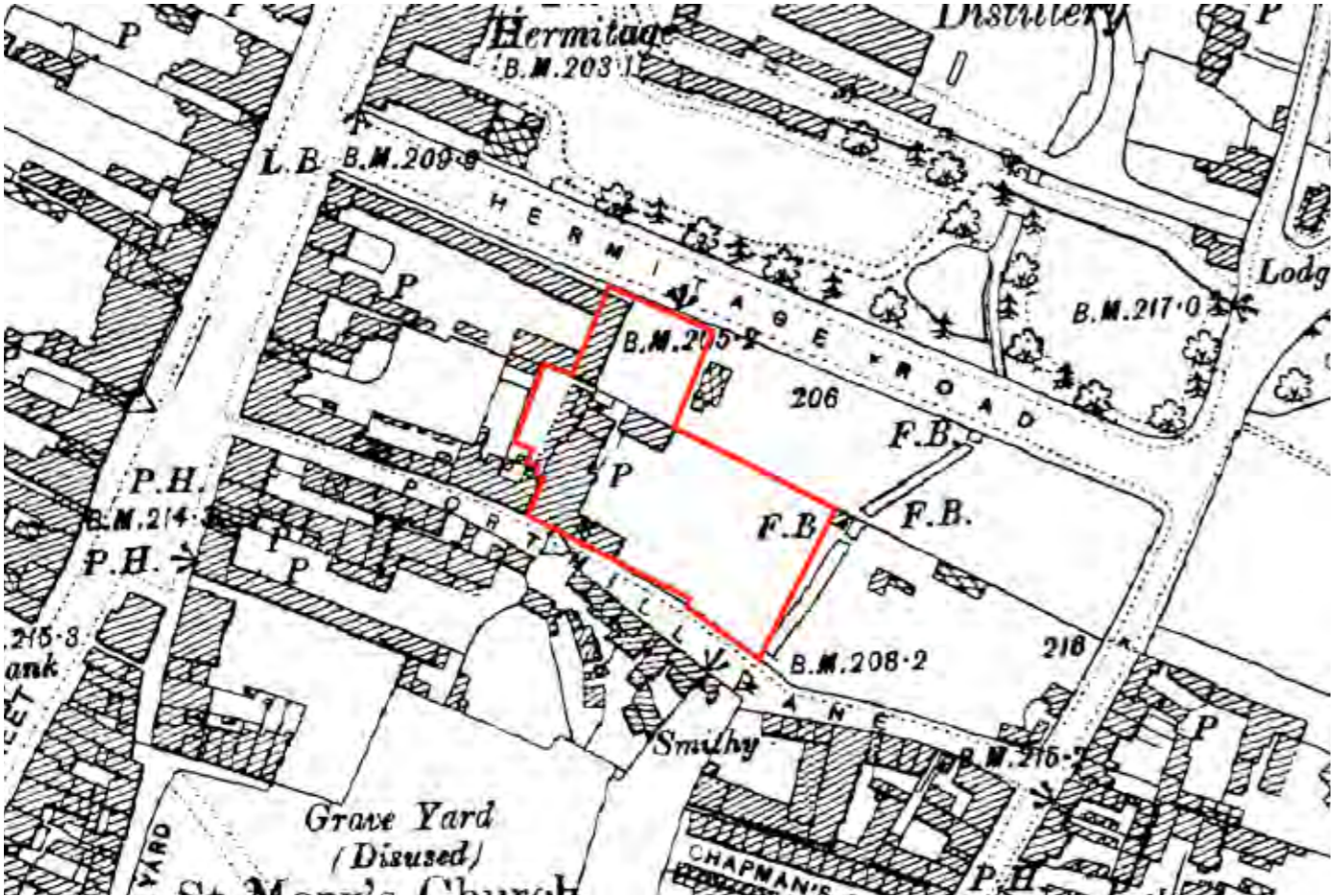


Historic map of Hitchin (1880s) Source: NHDC

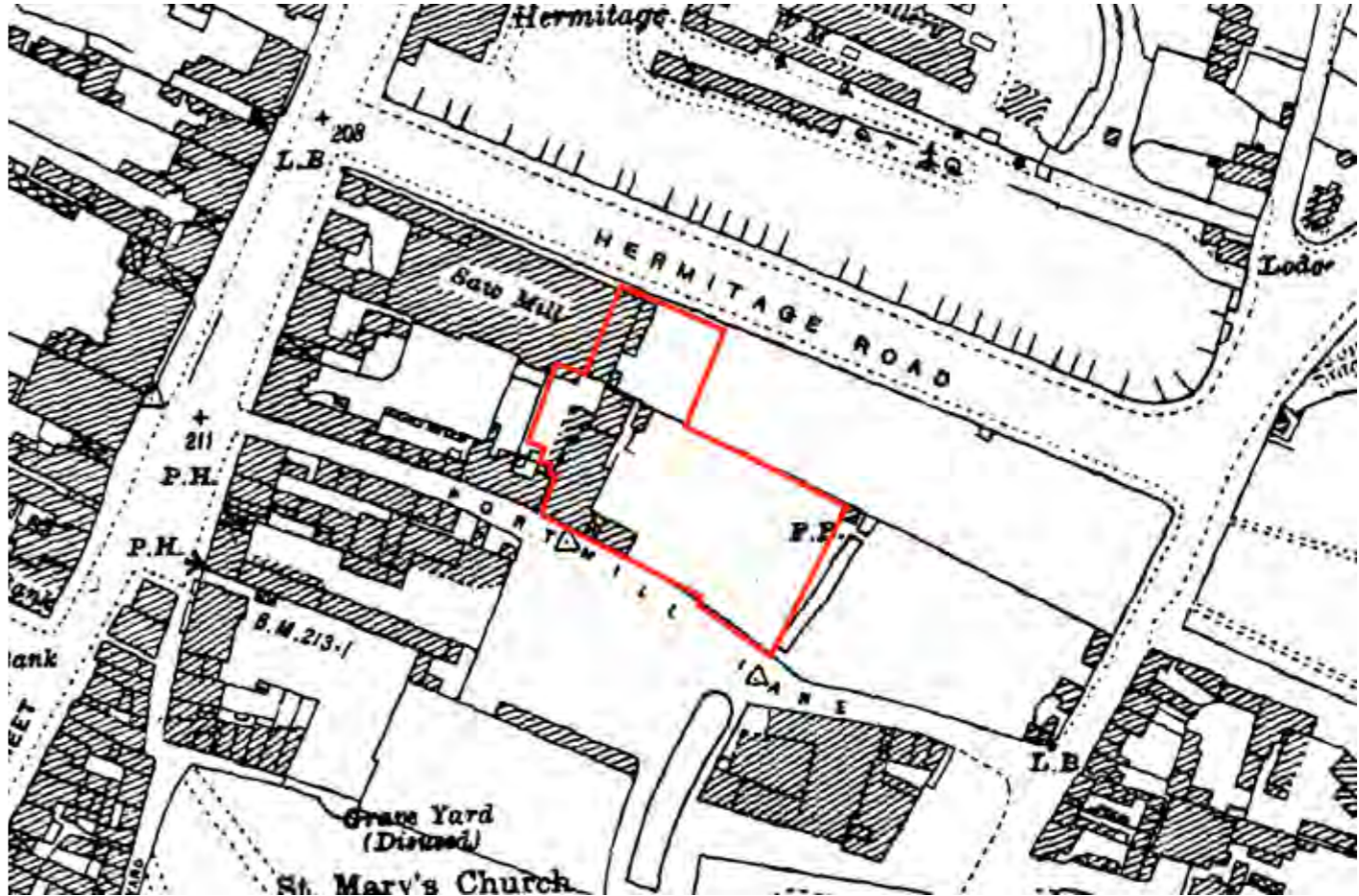
HISTORY OF THE ROYAL MAIL DELIVERY OFFICE SITE

- 2.10 Up until 1784 there was only one bridge over the River Hiz along Portmill Lane, which is one of the oldest streets in Hitchin. Hermitage Road was not built until 1875 and was designed to improve accessibility within the town, and in particular to connect the town centre with the railway station to the north east. Although Hermitage Road was built in 1875 the road was not fronted with buildings until the 1920's
- 2.11 Apart from the Port Mill which stood on the south east corner of Portmill Lane and Queen Street, the rest of the site was occupied by The Grange and its gardens. The Grange was a large house which was situated in the south west corner of the site. The Grange was the home of John Hawkins whose firm of solicitors is still working at the listed building next door at 7-8 Portmill Lane.

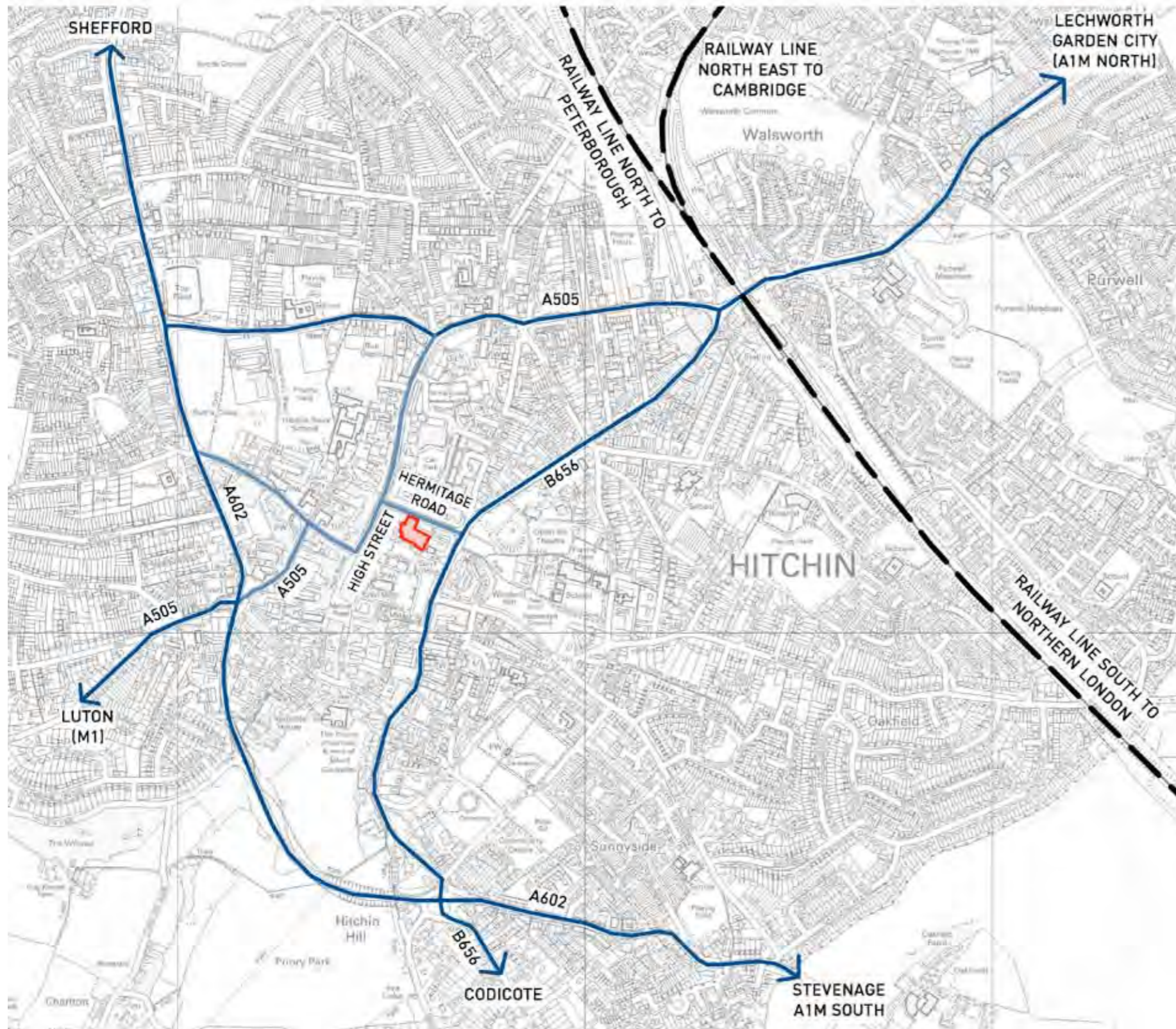
- 2.12 On the corner of Portmill Lane and Queen Street extensive deposits and structures of the post medieval period were revealed during an excavation in 1980. The deposits are believed to date back to the 17/18th centuries included a mill stone presumably from the original Port Mill.
- 2.13 During the 20th century the churchgate area immediately south of the site was transformed by the emergence and dependence of car travel. The churchgate area was redeveloped with smaller houses along Portmill Lane demolished. The River Hiz was canalised and a raised terrace built, which eventually formed the open space plaza/car park that stands today.



Historic map of Hitchin (1900) Source: NHDC







Historic map of Hitchin (1930) Source: NHDC



MOVEMENT AND ACCESS

- 2.14 The wider transport plan opposite shows the site within its context and highlights the arterial routes through Hitchin.
- 2.15 The B656 (Queen Street) runs north south adjacent to the site and provides vehicular access to the Junction 8 of the A1M approximately 3.5 miles away.
- 2.16 The site is currently accessed via Portmill Lane to the south of the site. Portmill Lane adjoins Queen Street to the east and the Bancroft via a pedestrian link to the west.
- 2.17 The eastern boundary of the site is flanked by a pedestrian walkway which is a key link from Portmill Lane car park and Churchgate to Hermitage Road and Hitchin town centre.

KEY:

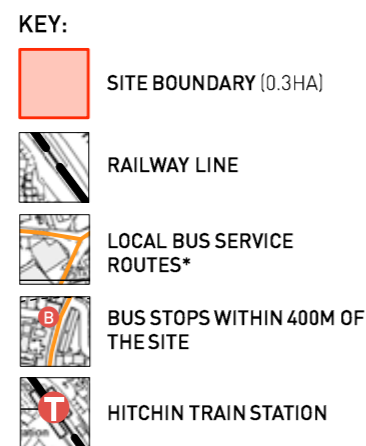
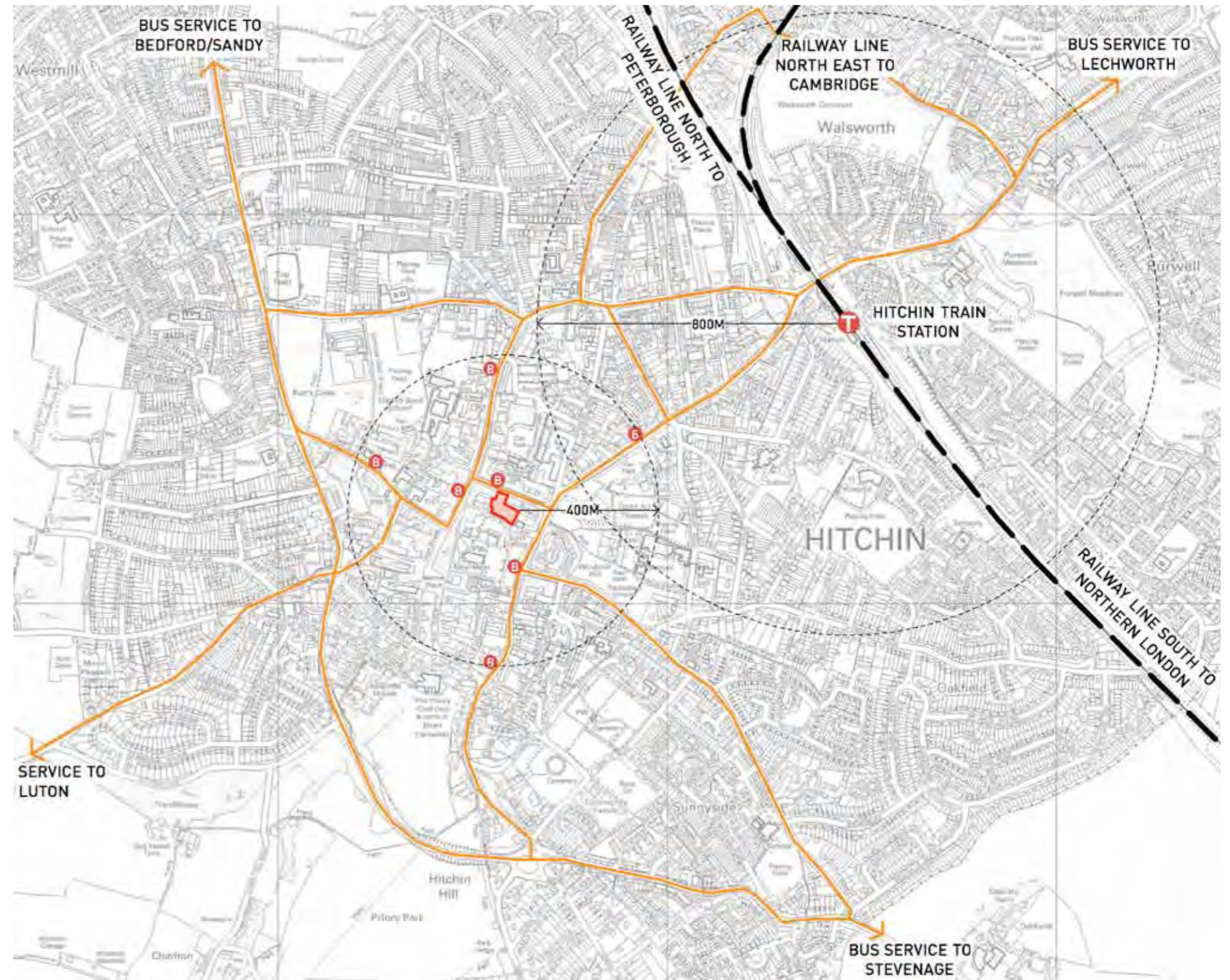
-  SITE BOUNDARY (0.3HA)
-  RAILWAY LINE
-  MAJOR VEHICULAR ROADS
-  MINOR VEHICULAR ROADS

MOVEMENT PLAN

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PUBLIC TRANSPORT

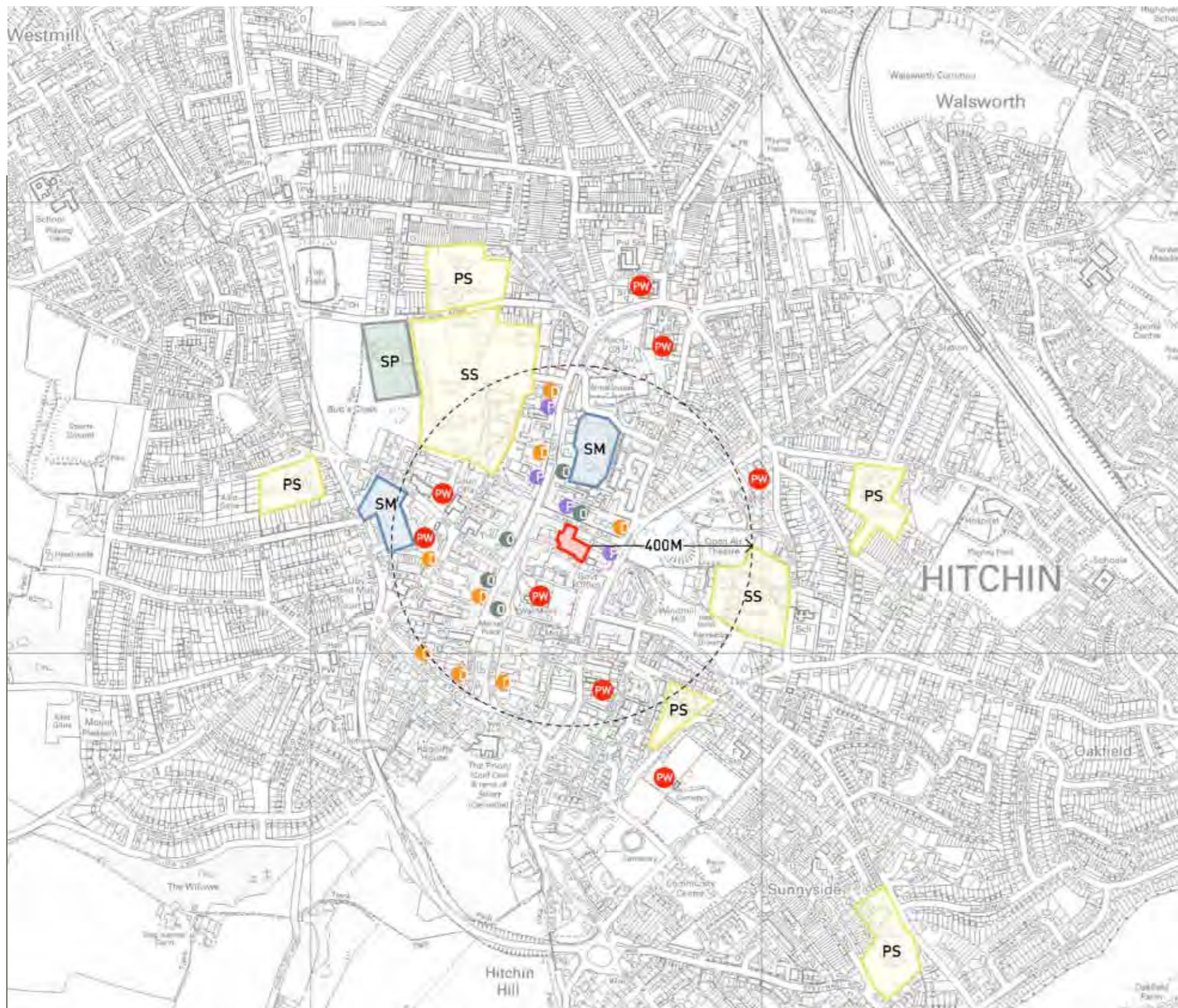
- 2.18 The public transport plan opposite locates the major public transport connections accessible to the site.
- 2.19 There are a number of bus services and bus stops within the immediate vicinity of the site. The public transport plan locates them and they are also listed below:
- **No. 80 Centrebus Stevenage - Hitchin** (Buses every half hour Monday to Saturday)
 - **No.82 Centrebus Biggleswade - Hitchin** (Buses every half hour Monday to Saturday)
 - **No.100 Stevenage - Luton via Hitchin & Luton Airport** (Hourly buses Monday to Saturday)
 - **No.101 Stevenage - Luton via Little Wymondley, Hitchin & Stopsley** (Hourly buses Monday to Saturday)
 - **No. 102 Stevenage - Luton via Hitchin, Great Offley, Lilley & Stopsley** (Hourly buses Monday to Saturday)
- 2.20 Hitchin Railway Station is located north east of the town centre. The railway line provides public transport north to Peterborough/Cambridge and south to North London.
- 2.21 400m and 800m radii circles are shown on the plan around nearby bus stops and the train station illustrating 5 and 10 minute respectively, walking times.
- 2.22 The Public Transport Plan demonstrates that the site is located in a sustainable location close to existing public transport links.



*NB Only major bus routes shown

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PLAN

CAM.0852_06-1



LOCAL FACILITIES

2.23 The local facilities plan opposite locates the key services in close proximity to the site and Hitchin town centre. With the site located centrally within Hitchin, it has access to a number of shops, services and amenities. A 400m radius has been drawn around the site representing a 5 minute walking time.

2.24 Along Hermitage Road there are a number of shops and services, these currently include:

- The Co-operative Travel
- Penco - Fine Arts and Crafts
- Subway
- William Hill
- Holland & Barrett
- Greys (Hair Salon)
- Everything 90p Store
- Kenmore Interiors
- Maysons
- Nu-Cross Pharmacy
- Kick Off (Sports and Ski)
- Peter B Jones
- Men@Work
- Allders Opticians
- Parc Computer Centre
- DoveTail
- Raj Douth
- Bathstore.com
- Wine Rack
- Newsagents
- Re-play
- Blockbuster
- Amplifon
- Kustomclothing
- Town Fryer
- Expressions Bridalwear
- Putterill's
- Footsteps
- Mainly Models
- Lake Interiors

KEY:

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
|  | SITE BOUNDARY (0.3HA) |  | DENTISTS |
|  | SS SECONDARY SCHOOLS |  | OPTICIANS |
|  | PS PRIMARY SCHOOLS |  | PHARMACY |
|  | SP SWIMMING POOL |  | PLACES OF WORSHIP |
|  | SM SUPERMARKETS | | |

LOCAL FACILITIES PLAN

CAM.0852_07-1

VIEWS INTO AND OUT OF THE SITE

2.25 The redevelopment of the Royal Mail Delivery Office should respond to views into and out of the site. The panoramic photos below illustrate the site within its surrounding context.



View south along the eastern boundary of the site and the existing walkway



View north west down Hermitage Road from Windmill Hill



View north west along Hermitage Road



View north towards the site overlooking the River Hiz and Portmill Lane car park

LOCAL CHARACTER

2.26 In order to establish a character for the proposed development an analysis of the key characteristics of the existing context has been carried out:

General:

- Predominantly mixed use retail with a residential element.
- 2, 2.5, 3 & 4 storey mixed-use and residential.
- Georgian buildings built of red brick with occasional buff brick and rendered buildings.

Layout and Spaces:

- The built form creates a strong enclosure and defines the street.
- Varied roofscape with different building heights and roof forms, occasional dormer windows.
- Buildings are located tight to the back edge of the pavement creating an intimate streetscape.
- Variety of paving materials differentiates the spaces.
- Formal squares are enclosed with strong frontages adding activity to the space.
- Keynote buildings close vistas.

Architectural Style:

- Predominately red brick, broken by occasional render buildings, which add variety to streetscape.
- Roof materials consist of single clay tiles or slate.
- Traditional sash windows are a common theme, with painted stone/brick cills to emphasise the fenestration.
- Projected brick courses define the storey height of buildings.
- Feature chimneys add character to the roofscape.
- Protruding gables add variety to the roofscape.
- A variety of door entrances including pitched canopies, flat canopies and arched stone entrances create a diverse street.
- Feature high walls provide privacy to rear gardens and enclose the streets.



LISTED BUILDINGS

2.27 The site is located within Hitchin Conservation Area. South of the site lies St Mary's Parish Church, a Grade I Listed Building. The relationship of the two sites means that the proposed development is likely to affect the wider setting of that Listed Building. Numbers 7 & 8 Portmill Lane are another listed building that borders the western boundary of the site. The Listed Buildings and Conservation Area are all nationally important heritage assets. Therefore, the proposed development in its overall scale, massing, height, landscaping, layout and materials must conserve their special character and significance while making a positive, and preferably enhancing, architectural contribution to the location.

ECOLOGY

2.28 The majority of the site consists hard standing, therefore it is not envisaged that any new development would have ecological implications on the existing landscape features. Any proposed development should look to incorporate new landscape features such as tree planting, more specifically efforts should be made to improve the River Hiz and its visual appearance.

FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

2.29 The majority of the site is located on a fluvial floodplain. Prior to any future development on this site a Flood Risk Assessment will need to be carried out.



View from Portmill Lane car park of the Listed Building at No.7 & 8 Portmill Lane



View south west of the River Hiz and St Marys Church



3: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

3.1 This document deals with the urban design issues associated with the proposals for the redevelopment of the Post Office site. Many of the urban design issues have regard to the wider planning policies for North Hertfordshire District Council. This section draws attention to key planning policy documents, which are applicable to urban design.

3.2 Government policy in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and a core principle in support of this is:

“Always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings”

(para 17, point 4, NPPF 2012)

3.3 The NPPF also supports the redevelopment of brownfield sites and the promotion of mixed use developments in town centres:

“Encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value” (para 17, point 8, NPPF 2012)

Promote mixed use developments and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production)” (para 17, point 9, NPPF 2012)

3.4 National Planning Policy Framework (Section 7: Requiring good design) sets out the Government’s commitment to good design:

“The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.”

“It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.”

(para. 56 & 57, NPPF 2012).

3.5 Section 7 of the NPPF, seeks to promote more sustainable development by requiring developers to address the following:

- i add to the overall quality of the area;
- ii establish a strong sense of place;
- iii optimise the use of land and placing an importance on high quality design;
- iv respond to the local character and history;
- v create safe and accessible environments; and
- vi are visually attractive with good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

3.6 Whilst the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has replaced the Planning Policy Statements the following design guidance documents are still relevant to creating good design:

- By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice (DETR/CABE, 2000);
- By Design – Better Places to Live: A Companion Guide to PPG3 (DETR/CABE, 2001);
- Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention (ODPM, 2004);
- Manual for Streets 1 & 2 (DOT/DCLG 2007/2010); and

3.7 Section 12 of the NPPF sets out the Government’s aim in conserving and enhancing the historic environment stating that local planning authorities should take into account:

“the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

(para. 126, NPPF 2012).

LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

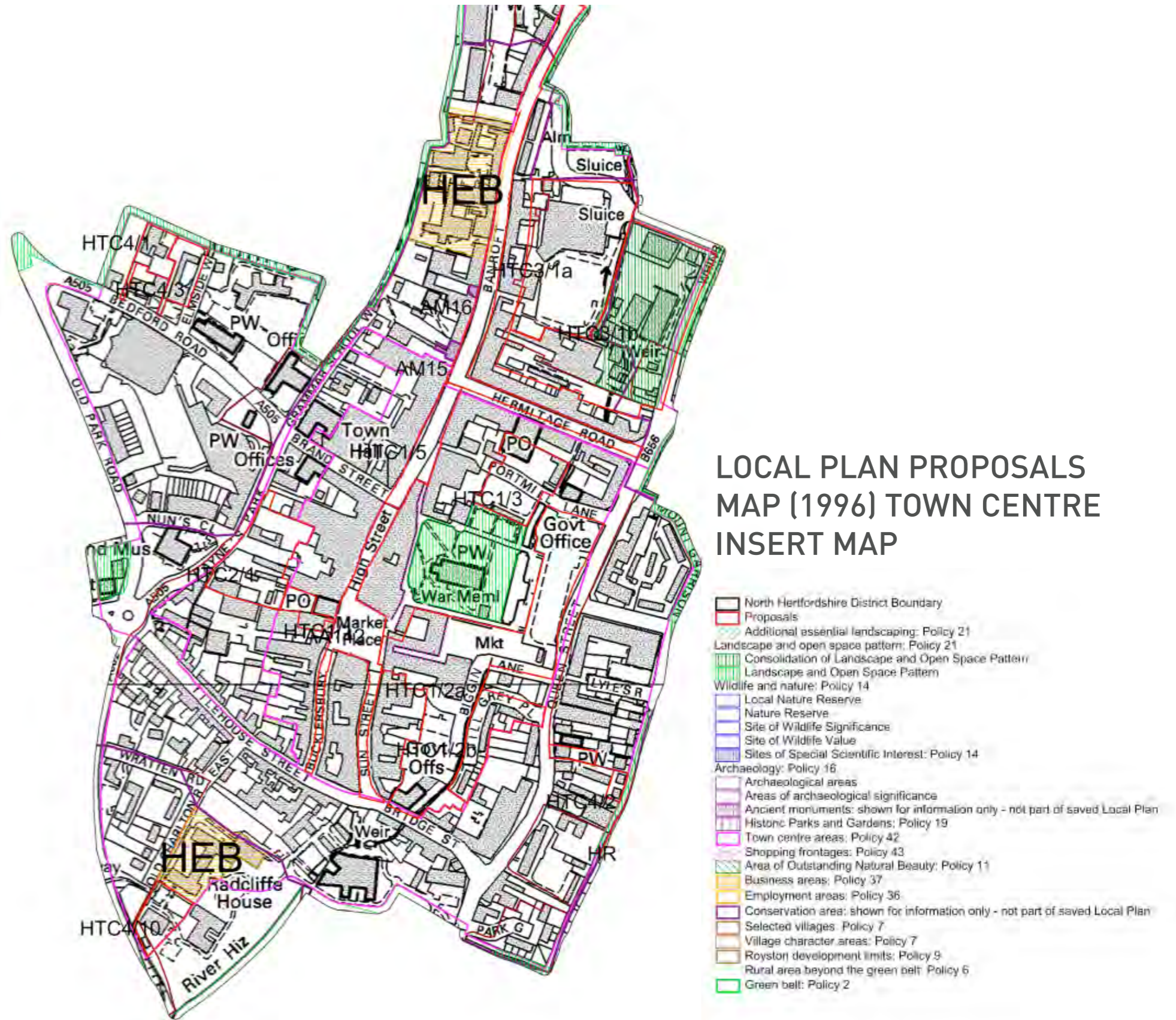
NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN (1996)

3.8 The Royal Mail Delivery Office site is currently designated use class A1 retail, B8 storage and distribution with associated offices.

3.9 The Local Plan Proposals Map (1996) Town Centre Insert Map, references the site to Local Plan Policy HTC1/3 'Sorting Office and Portmill Lane Car Park' which states that:

"In consultation with the Post Office, the Council will examine opportunities for alternative uses on the site, should the present operation, or parts of it, cease. Such uses may include Post Office counter facilities and retail uses on the northern side of the site, with car parking to the rear. Other town centre uses may be appropriate, subject to increased parking for town centre uses still be available and the scale of the development being appropriate for the site. The Council will be particularly concerned to ensure that high quality pedestrian links between car parking and the shopping areas are provided and that landscaped open space is introduced into the area where appropriate."

3.10 This policy was not explicitly saved post 2007 but does show the District Council's intentions for redevelopment of the site and highlights the potential for different uses at the Royal Mail Delivery Office site.



HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY 2004

- 3.11 The Hitchin Town Centre Strategy was adopted in 2004 and sets out the vision for the Town for the period to 2016 and beyond as the following:
- “To maintain the quality of the built environment based on its intrinsic historic character, and to develop an attractive, safe, accessible, vibrant and lively town centre for the local community and visitors to shop, work and live in”.
- 3.12 Policy 22 of the strategy states that ‘The Council, working together with potential developers and landowners, will prepare Planning Briefs for the following key development sites in accordance with the aims and policy guidance set out in the this Town Centre Strategy’ including The Post Office site. Other sites included within policy 22 include The Churchgate Centre, the Market and the car park at Biggin Lane, retaining and enhancing the market.
- 3.13 Due to the close proximity of the Churchgate site it is important that this development brief remains flexible and considers the redevelopment of the Churchgate area within any layout drawings.
- 3.14 Of particular importance to the Royal Mail Delivery Office site redevelopment is the aim to open up and improve the River Hiz walkway and retain key views of St Mary’s Church.

RIVER HIZ DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES 1995

- 3.15 The Royal Mail Delivery Office site is specifically mentioned under the section entitled ‘Area 5 Portmill Lane and Hermitage Road’, paragraph 12.6.1 states that
- “This particular section of the river has an important pedestrian link between Portmill Lane and Hermitage Road. It is widely used by people who park close to the town centre and visit shops and is also a short cut for those people coming from further afield...Should the Portmill sorting office site become available for redevelopment any scheme should not turn its back on the river but face it and provide an attractive environment for people to walk with, perhaps, shops or a cafe. Considerable intermediate improvements could be made in this area with the use of planning and street furniture...”
- 3.16 Information from the Environment Agency states that “our prior written consent is required for any works or structures, in, under, or over or within eight metres of the top of the bank of the River Hiz”. Due to the site’s close proximity to the River Hiz the site is classified as Flood Risk 1, and as such a Flood Risk Assessment would need to be produced outlining the management of surface water runoff from the site.

HITCHIN CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT – 2011

- 3.17 The Hitchin Conservation Area Character Statement was published on 26th July 2011 and provides comprehensive information about the area and its development over time. Section 7.3 is entitled ‘Character Area 3: Queen Street and Hermitage Road’, this specifically mentions the Royal Mail Delivery Office site as a negative feature and as an opportunity for enhancement.
- 3.18 Archaeology is an important consideration for the redevelopment of the Royal Mail Delivery Office site because of recent Anglo Saxon findings. It is thought that the Royal Mail Delivery Office site may be situated upon land which was originally a garden for a Manor House and possibly part of a medieval defensive ditch structure. It is advised that an Archaeological assessment of the site be carried out as soon as possible to deal with the findings appropriately.

CHURCHGATE AREA PLANNING BRIEF

- 3.19 North Hertfordshire District Council is keen to comprehensively redevelop the Churchgate centre and its surrounding area. A Planning Brief has been prepared for the area which was adopted in 2005. The Churchgate development area covered by the Planning Brief comprises the existing Churchgate Shopping Area plus service areas, the market area and the land between the River Hiz and St. Mary's Square and the Biggin Lane Car Park. The St Mary's Square and Portmill Lane car parks were identified as areas for enhancement. A Final Report was also prepared as a background paper to the Planning Brief. This Report outlined the consultation process and the various development options considered for the area including making reference to the longer term vision, which included the possibility of development on the St. Mary's and Portmill Lane car parks.
- 3.20 The purpose of the Churchgate Development Project is to develop a high quality retail-led, mixed use scheme, with a residential component which will significantly enhance the town of Hitchin, in terms of the quality of its retail offer whilst at the same time retaining its historic character. The Council appointed a development partner in 2010 to bring the site forward for development. A number of development options are being considered for the site in consultation with key landowners and stakeholders. It is worth keeping up to date with the proposals for the Churchgate area to ensure that the Royal Mail Delivery Office site can be redeveloped in an appropriate and flexible manner that will take into account, complement and not inhibit the Churchgate Development Brief and any development proposals that come forward for land identified within the brief.

RETAIL

- 3.21 It is necessary to consider the land uses which the Council would consider to be acceptable in the redevelopment of the Post Office Delivery site. Policy 7 of the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy states that the Council will encourage:
- "the retention and improvement of shopping in the core of Hitchin town centre and,
 - other measures to attract customers and investors whilst enhancing its local character and identity.
 - The Council will support appropriate regeneration including redevelopment and environmental enhancement, a mix of land uses outside the shopping core including housing."
- 3.22 Furthermore Policy 8 states that "The Council will support shopping within the town centre, and refuse non-shopping proposals within primary shopping frontages. The mix of uses will be reviewed regularly to ensure the continued vitality and viability of the town centre". In relation to the Royal Mail Delivery Office site it is considered that the frontage to Hermitage Road should incorporate an element of ground floor retailing or similar to maintain an active frontage in this location. Whilst buildings fronting Portmill Lane offer more flexibility for uses including some residential.
- 3.23 Policy 9 states that "The Council will encourage and approve proposals for the appropriate location of food and drink and leisure uses in the town centre, at street level or above, that will actively contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre and not to the detriment of primary shopping frontages or the amenity of local residents." This use provides another alternative for the frontage to Hermitage Road however it is noted that there is already considerable competition from existing establishments in the area.

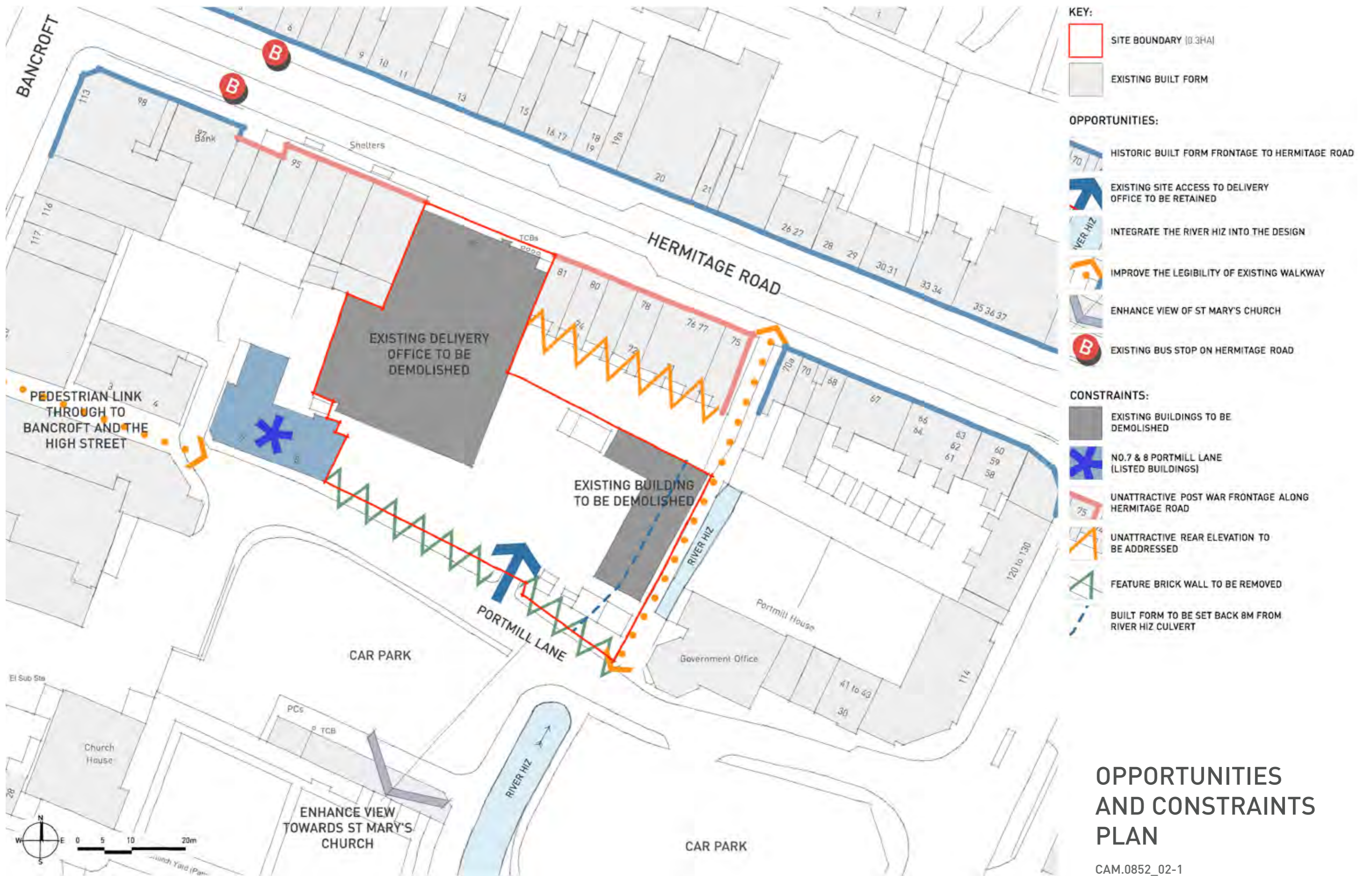
DESIGN SPD (JULY 2011)

- 3.24 North Hertfordshire District Council have produced the Design SPD to provide advice for developers and applicants when submitting planning applications. The Design SPD should;
- Provide a compendium of guidance for Planning Officers and Consultants;
 - Provide further guidance and background evidence in respect of the Core Strategy and Development Policies.
 - Create not just high quality buildings but high quality buildings that contribute to and enhance the character of their surroundings and that are durable and long lasting.
 - Prevent standard 'anywhere' designs.
- 3.25 The Design SPD provides guidance on how Design and Access Statements should be structured, as well as underlining the key urban design principles that should form the backbone to any proposed design.
- 3.26 The Design SPD goes on to address the importance of Hitchin's historic town centre as a precedent for the design of new developments.
- ## RESIDENTIAL
- 3.27 Policy 18 states "The Council will promote and where appropriate approve well designed proposals for housing through the re-use and conversion of floor space in vacant commercial buildings or in upper floors above shops, or as part of new developments. Net losses of housing will be refused." It is considered that an element of residential use would be appropriate for the Royal Mail Delivery Office site.
- 3.28 The emerging Core Strategy Policy G outlines the provision of affordable housing around a tiered basis. 15 - 24 dwellings providing 35% affordable, 10 - 14 dwellings providing 30% affordable and 5 - 9 dwellings providing 20% affordable.

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS/ GUIDANCE:

- Planning Obligations – November 2006
- Vehicle Parking at New Development - November 2011
- SPG 6: Designing for Accessibility – August 1994
- SPG 8: Urban Regeneration – September 1997
- SPG 12: Design Guide for a Shopfront in Hitchin – January 1998
- SPG 15: Shopping Areas in Town Centres – February 1999
- SPG: North Herfordshire Town Cycle Routes Network (Part 4 Hitchin) – December 2000





4: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

4.1 The opportunities and constraints presented by the site are utilised to inform and structure the development proposals. These are outlined below and illustrated, where appropriate, on the opportunities and constraints.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunity to create good quality residential/commercial architecture through the use of local vernacular styles.
- Opportunity to enhance the existing walkway creating a legible link from Portmill Lane to Hermitage Road.
- Opportunity to improve the quality of public realm within and adjacent to the site.
- Opportunity to improve the southern boundary of the site and create an attractive frontage to Portmill Lane.
- Redevelop the Royal Mail Delivery Office with contemporary architecture, particularly to Hermitage Road.
- Enhance setting of St Mary's Church.
- The potential for ground floor commercial fronting Hermitage Road and Portmill Lane.
- Opportunity to demolish the Royal Mail Delivery Office.

CONSTRAINTS

- The unattractive rear elevation of 71-81 Hermitage Road.
- Respond to unattractive frontage of 91-95 Hermitage Road.
- Respond to the architectural quality of the listed buildings on 7-8 Portmill Lane.
- Address the vast area of car parking south of the site boundary.
- Minimising the impact of the development on existing residents.
- Maintain views of St Mary's Church.
- 8m development set back from River Hiz Culvert.
- The demolition of 71-81 Hermitage Road was explored but not seen as a viable option due to multiple ownerships.
- When a planning application is formally submitted reports should be provided to consider the issues of air quality and contamination.

5: LAND USE DISPOSITION

5.1 After analysing the site and drawing up the opportunities and constraints the following section will discuss the potential land uses for the site.

HERMITAGE ROAD FRONTAGE

5.2 As the previous local facilities plan demonstrates, the Hermitage Road frontage has the potential to accommodate a range of land uses. A1 (Shops) and A3 (Restaurants and Cafes) land uses would integrate well with the existing land uses along Hermitage Road, whilst a C1 (Hotels) land use would not feel out of place in this town centre location.

5.3 As with much of the existing 1st/2nd/3rd floor dwellings, a C3 (residential) land use would add variety to the streetscape of Hermitage Road.

PORTMILL LANE FRONTAGE

5.4 The Portmill Lane frontage addresses the Portmill Lane car park and although not a main high street it is still an active location. A residential land use could provide an attractive continuation of 7 – 8 Portmill Lane as the opposite side of Portmill Lane did once consist of smaller residential dwellings (as shown on the historical maps on pages 8 & 9).

5.5 With the potential redevelopment of Churchgate the Portmill Lane frontage should remain flexible to the potential accommodation of ground floor A1/A3 land use, particularly at the south east corner of the site adjacent to the pedestrian link.

5.6 The wall along Portmill Lane is an older feature. However, its removal does provide an opportunity to create an active, attractive and positive street frontage along the lane to enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area.

RIVER HIZ WALKWAY

5.7 The widening of the River Hiz walkway provides the opportunity to improve surveillance over what is a well used pedestrian connection from Portmill Lane to Hermitage Road. An additional walkway through the site was considered, but eventually it was decided that an additional link would disrupt the formation of a secure perimeter block and was unnecessary due to the close proximity of the River Hiz walkway which is an established route to Hermitage Road.

5.8 The implementation of residential dwellings would provide natural surveillance, whilst the inclusion of C1/A1/A3 land uses particularly on the south east corner is also a possibility.

5.9 A1/A3 land uses were not considered appropriate along the River Hiz Walkway as they would fail to compete with rival shops and cafes along Hermitage Road.

GENERAL

5.10 Car parking will provide a temporary land use for the site whilst new development proposals are considered. An element of car parking should also be considered as part of the proposed development to support the range of land uses.

5.11 The proposed development should look to incorporate an element of open space. This could be in the form of hard or soft landscaping to break up the hard surface materials.

UNSUITABLE LAND USES

5.12 Industrial land uses, storage facilities and distribution centres were not considered as being appropriate for the site due to the town centre location within a conservation area. They would also fail to integrate with the existing land uses along Hermitage Road.

5.13 With the site area only equating 0.3 hectares a leisure complex was not seen as a viable option either.

5.14 The public consultation did suggest some level of support for a cinema, but there is no evidence of viable interest from cinema operators. Similarly, there was some public support for additional community hall space, but this is not supported by the Council's Community Halls Strategy.

PARKING

5.15 The issue of parking has been given particular attention, albeit car ownership levels for the occupiers of the residential element of the scheme may be reduced due to this site occupying a town centre location with local facilities and services being within easy walking distance of the site. In addition, the site has good access to bus services and is a short walk from the railway station.

5.16 However, the developer of the site is committed to providing on site parking to meet the needs of both the proposed flats/apartments as well as disabled parking for the hotel. Whilst the guests to the hotel will use the car parks in the town centre it is recognised that the peak usage of the hotel will not usually coincide with that of the retail facilities within Hitchin. In addition, due to the highly accessible location of the site it is also recognised that guests will arrive by public transport.






View of existing River Hiz walkway



View of the Royal Mail Delivery Office in its context along Hermitage Road

KEY:

-  SITE BOUNDARY (0.3HA)
-  MIXED-USE
- Potential for a hotel / separate self contained retail use / restaurant on the ground floor fronting Hermitage Road / residential.
-  RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS

LAND USE DISPOSITION PLAN

CAM.0852_10-1



6: DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- 6.1 Within the framework of the various concepts outlined previously, the success of the development is dependent upon achieving an appropriate balance between community needs, development principles, development form and a positive response to local conditions.
- 6.2 In line with national and local design guidance and policy, considerable importance has been placed on creating a well designed sustainable place which promotes high quality design. The application of urban design principles and the vision will ensure a high quality sustainable development is achieved.
- 6.3 The principles which have been developed in order to define sustainable development have been derived from the site specific approach in conjunction with the delivery of a high quality development which achieves the criteria set out in the recent NPPF and previous design guidance documents that are not replaced by the new NPPF. The principles are as follows;

CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

“To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.”

(By Design, DETR 2000)

- Opportunity to establish a new distinctive identity to the development, whilst having its own character and integrating with the landscape character;
- Retention of the existing landscaping features around the site - the canalised River Hiz, the pedestrian walkway and the setting of the church;
- Establish a distinctive identity through well designed spaces, built form and architecture inspired by local detailing and materials;
- Minimise the impact of the development on the surrounding context;
- Maintaining a human dimension in terms of scale to the built form for ease of orientation;
- Variety is fundamental to creating a place with its own character, visual interest and activity, so a well functioning place should cater for a range of lifestyles and activities and should respond to the local community;
- Response to the existing architectural style and character; and
- Ensure a 'sense of place' to the development.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE

“To promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas.”

(By Design, DETR 2000)

- Provision of a clear hierarchy of connected spaces and places, including streets, accessible by a variety of users which consider the design of the space as well as its function as a movement corridor;
- Integration of proposed landscape features in order to soften the built form;
- Creation of a clearly defined public realm through the provision of strong building frontage lines and variations in enclosure of private spaces; and
- Control of access to private areas, particularly rear gardens and parking courts.



QUALITY OF PUBLIC REALM

“To promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.”

(By Design, DETR 2000)

- A response to the existing landscape context ensured through the retention of landscape features. Important views into and out of the site should be established and incorporated into the development layout;
- Integration between the scheme, adjacent dwellings and the town centre of Hitchin;
- Construction of a range of housing types, sizes and tenures; and
- The construction of commercial/mixed use buildings.

EASE OF MOVEMENT

“To promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.”

(By Design, DETR 2000)

- Creation of convenient, safe and direct access for all residents to the local facilities;
- Provision of vehicular access points into the development;
- The creation of legible pedestrian links adjacent to the site;
- The new community can be integrated with the existing urban fabric, both physically and socially. This can be achieved through sympathetic design and strong movement links; and
- Seek to integrate the development by providing a high level of accessibility for all users, specifically promoting access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, as well as the needs for vehicles.

LEGIBILITY

“To promote legibility through development that provides recognizable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.”

(By Design, DETR 2000)

- The development should respect local context and historical character and strengthen and enrich local identity, character and distinctiveness;
- Consideration of views in and out of the site;
- Provision of buildings that assist in navigation through the development as well as signify gateway points;
- Other physical connections, such as the River Hiz should also be incorporated into the development proposals; and
- Varying building heights and materials by encouraging high quality design to create variety and visual interest to assist in creating diversity and distinctiveness.



ADAPTABILITY

“To promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.”

(By Design, DETR 2000)

- Encouragement of walking, cycling and public transport use rather than the use of the private car thereby reducing the reliance on natural resources;
- Use of energy efficient building techniques;
- Achievement of passive solar gain through the careful orientation of buildings where possible; and
- Delivering the opportunity for significant local employment in Hitchin.

DIVERSITY

“To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.”

(By Design, DETR 2000)

- Locating facilities within walkable catchments; and
- Provision of a well balanced mix of residential tenures and house types.

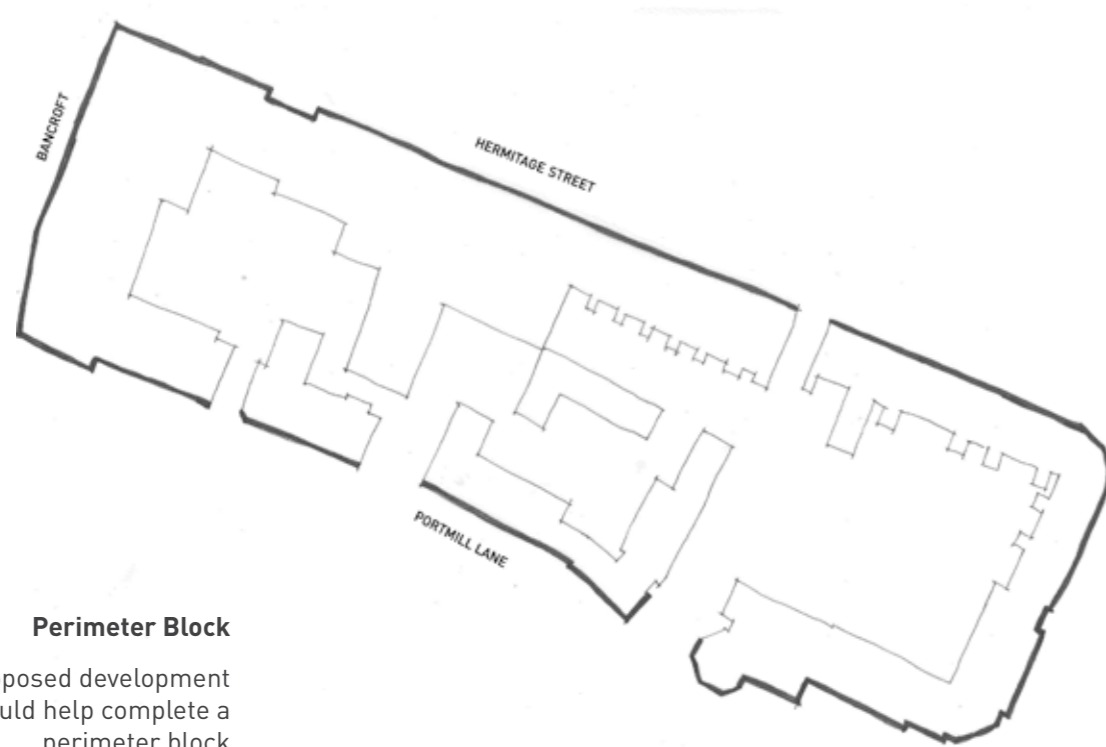


DESIGN CONCEPT

6.4 The following section outlines the key design ideas that ultimately form the Indicative Masterplan. The sketch plans (below left) illustrate the thought process in developing the below concept plan:

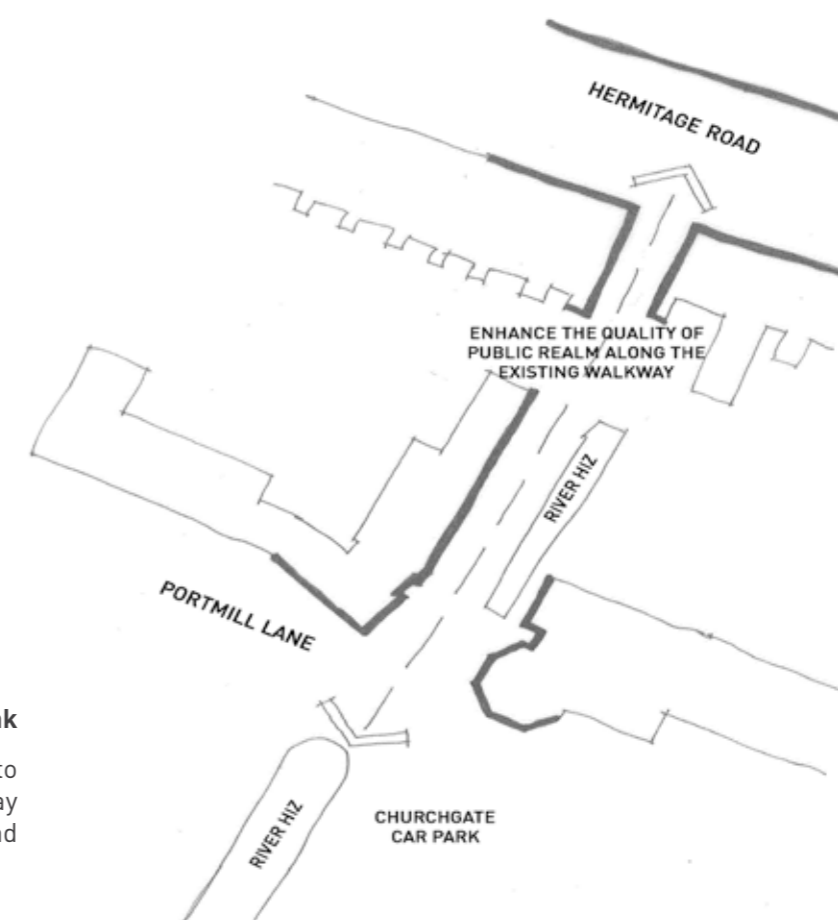
- Re-establish a perimeter block
- A strong active frontage to Hermitage Road and Portmill Lane.

- Widen and enhance the existing pedestrian link between Portmill Lane and Hermitage Road rather than proposing a new link through the development as this would disrupt a secure perimeter block.
- To sensitively integrate the proposed development with the surrounding built form to the east and west
- Respond to views into the site, particularly from the south.
- Integrate the River Hiz into the development.



Perimeter Block

The proposed development would help complete a perimeter block

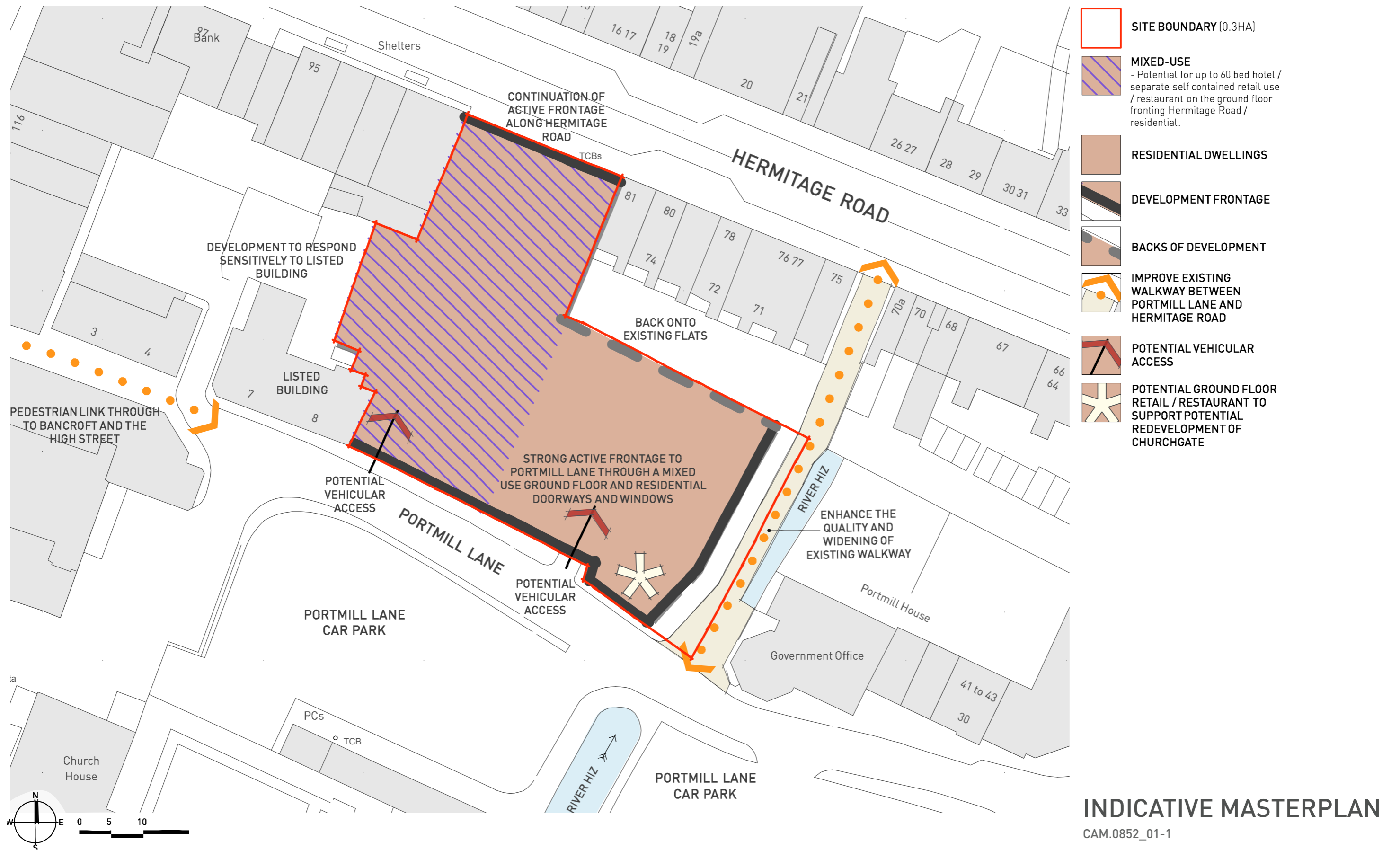


Pedestrian Link

Active frontages to promote existing walkway to Hermitage Road



7: DESIGN PROPOSALS



- 7.1 This section sets out the design proposals for the site whilst highlighting how the findings outlined in the previous sections have been utilized to inform the development form.

USE AND AMOUNT

Hotel (Class C1)

- 7.2 The site proposes the potential for a hotel set within the site on the western half fronting Hermitage Road. The hotel footprint should total up to 20,000 sq ft over four floors, the equivalent of up to 60 beds. The hotel is provided with a servicing area with access from Portmill Lane and potential for parking in existing town centre car parks.

Shops (Class A1)

- 7.3 The indicative masterplan demonstrates the potential to include an element of A1 land use particularly along Hermitage Road.
- 7.4 The Indicative Masterplan suggests the potential for some ground floor A1/A3 land use fronting Portmill Lane to integrate with the potential redevelopment of the Churchgate area which has the potential to accommodate a market.

Restaurants and Cafes (Class A3)

- 7.5 The scheme has the potential to incorporate an element of ground floor restaurants and cafes, ideally along the Hermitage Road frontage as part of a mixed-use building containing the hotel in the masterplan. This would integrate well with other A1 – A5 uses along Hermitage Road. There is also the potential to implement restaurants and cafes on the south east corner of the site to integrate with the potential redevelopment of the Churchgate area.

Residential (Class C3)

- 7.6 The scale of development provides the opportunity to incorporate architectural styles which could be modern or traditional, provided they respond well to and complement the surrounding area. As found within traditional townscapes, a hierarchy of flats and apartments is proposed.

Affordable Housing

- 7.7 In accordance with policy affordable housing will be provided within the development in small clusters and could include social rented, affordable and shared equity.

LAYOUT

A Hierarchy of Streets and Spaces

- 7.8 The Indicative Masterplan shows the potential disposition of land uses and the proposed structure of the development. A well connected movement network, accessible by all users, is proposed which helps ensure that all areas of the development are easy to navigate, safe and secure.
- 7.9 The movement hierarchy plan on page 34 clearly defines the main existing routes that encompass the development. The hierarchy recognises the need to combine the function of the street as a movement corridor alongside its place function. The importance of each of the street types in terms of its movement and place function varies within the hierarchy. The streets are defined by the building layout, so that buildings rather than roads dominate.
- 7.10 The Indicative Masterplan recognises the potential for two vehicular access points into the site, both from the south via Portmill Lane to cater for the variety of land uses proposed for the site.
- 7.11 The proposed indicative masterplan recognises the need for a legible link between Portmill Lane and Hermitage Road. The Indicative Masterplans propose to significantly enhance the quality of the existing walkway which runs parallel to the eastern boundary. By significantly widening this existing walkway and making it a more attractive route, this scheme argues against the need for an additional link from Portmill Lane to Hermitage Road through the site as this would disrupt the secure perimeter block formation.
- 7.12 As previously demonstrated in the concept design stage the scheme proposes to complete a secure perimeter block with active frontages overlooking the existing streets and spaces. Within the perimeter block secure Mews streets or courtyards can be formed. The Mews streets should have limited car access and with the adjoining land area to the south consisting of a car park and with bus stops in accessible locations along Hermitage Road, it could be argued there is less need for the car.

PARKING ARRANGEMENTS

- 7.13 The below parking standards should take into account the sustainable location of the site and its close proximity to existing public transport and should be used as a guideline for the proposed development.

7.14 Residential Parking Standards (Class Use C3)

- 7.15 The Supplementary Planning Document, Vehicle Parking at New Development states the following parking standards:

- 1 Bedroom requires a minimum of 1 space per dwelling.
- 2+ Bedrooms requires a minimum of 2 spaces per dwelling

- 7.16 The SPD does go on to state that: 'The above standards will also require visitor/unallocated parking as set out below to be added. Garages will be counted towards meeting the standards only if they are at least 7m x 3m measured internally. Reductions will be considered only in exceptional circumstances e.g. very small scale conversion of buildings for small number of residential units in town centre'

Use Class A1 Parking Standards

- 7.17 The Supplementary Planning Document, Vehicle Parking at New Development states the following parking standards:

- Small food shops up to 500m² gfa 1 space per 30m² gfa.
- Non-food retail warehouses with garden centres 1 space per 25 m²gfa.

Use Class A3 Parking Standards

- 7.18 The Supplementary Planning Document, Vehicle Parking at New Development states the following parking standards:

- Restaurants and Cafes require 1 space per 5 m² of floorspace of dining area plus 3 spaces per 4 employees.

Hotel Parking Standards (Use Class C1)

- 7.19 The Supplementary Planning Document, Vehicle Parking at New Development states the following parking standards:

- 1 space per bedroom (including staff accommodation) plus 1 space per manager plus 2 spaces per 3 staff minus spaces related to staff bedrooms plus 1 space per 5 m² dining area plus 1 space per 3 m² bar area plus 1 space per 5 m² public area in conference facility plus 1 space per 6 m² of public area in exhibition hall plus a minimum of 1 coach parking space per 100 bedrooms.

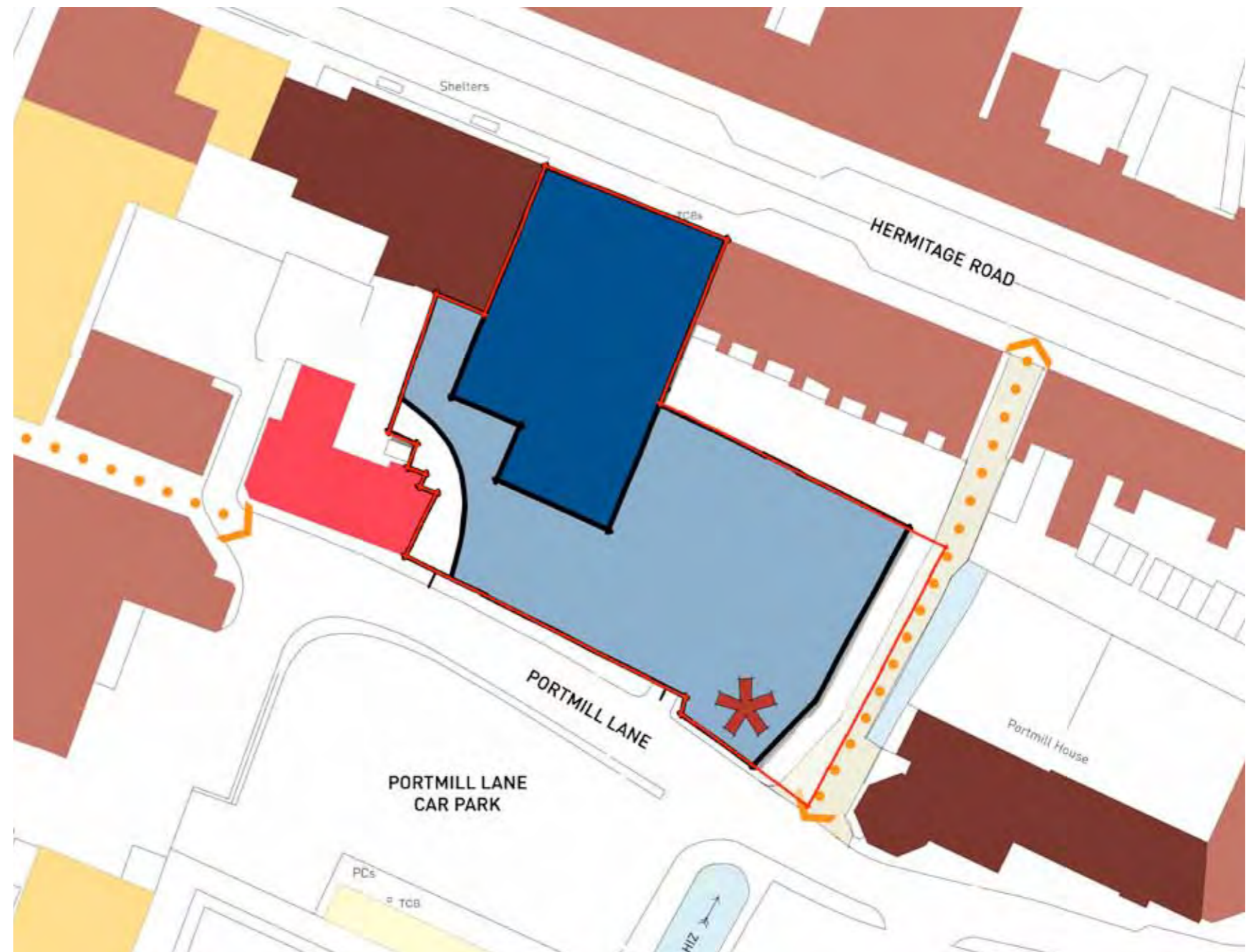
- 7.20 Due to the town centre location of the site, development proposals should look to minimise the amount of parking provided and instead incorporate links to more sustainable modes of transport such as public transport in the form of existing bus stops on Hermitage Road and Hitchin train station.

BUILT FORM, SCALE AND MASSING

- 7.21 The building heights plan opposite demonstrates the proposed building heights for the Royal Mail Delivery Office site along with the existing building heights for the surrounding context. The scheme demonstrates the potential for up to 4 storeys along Hermitage Road to integrate with the adjacent existing buildings.
- 7.22 The southern boundary proposes a maximum height of 4 storeys along the south eastern corner in response to the 4 storey government building east of the site.
- 7.23 It should be noted that the proposed 4 storey buildings will be lower in height than the existing 4 storey buildings to sensitively integrate the proposed development with the surrounding built form.
- 7.24 As a consequence of comments made at the public consultation exercise, the buildings adjacent to the River Hiz have been reduced to three storeys allowing the potential for a four storey landmark building on south eastern corner of the site. The development along this boundary is likely to be stepped.
- 7.25 Within the site building heights drop to 3 storeys to ensure that the proposed development does not overpower the surrounding built form, particularly the 2.5 storey listed building to the west.
- 7.26 The 2.5 storey listed building adjacent to the site has a steeply pitched roof so that a suitably located, proportioned and well-designed 3 storey building in its vicinity should not be overpowering.
- 7.27 Adjoining the listed buildings at 7-8 Portmill Lane there will need to be particular care taken with design and heights. This is a matter for the detailed design phase, such that the building heights plan shows no specific height for that corner of the site. One solution might be to have one of the access points into the site next to the listed buildings, creating a space with the flank wall of the listed building enclosing the space on one side.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

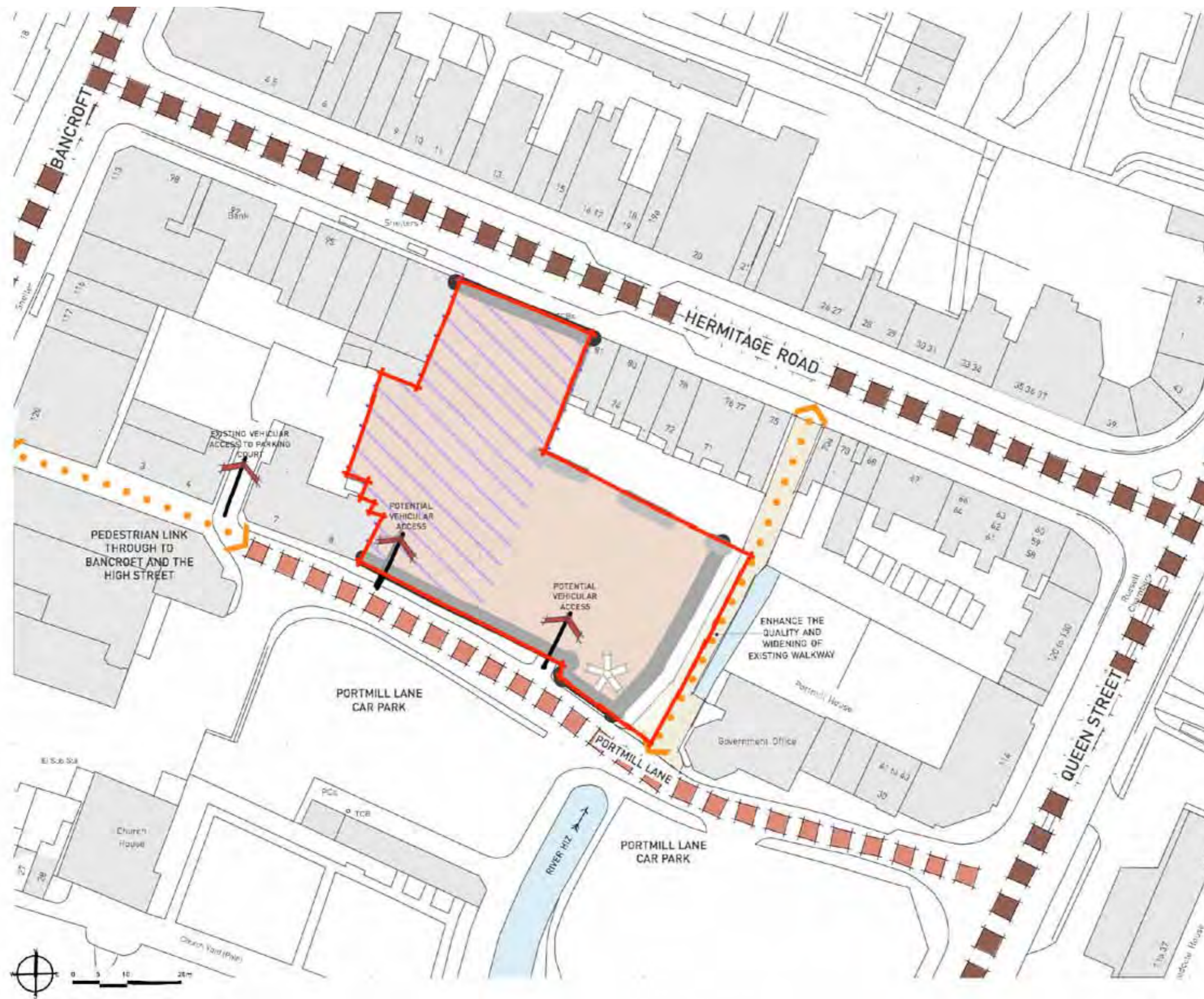
- 7.28 The widening of the existing walkway between Portmill Lane and Hermitage Road provides the opportunity to enhance the quality of the streetscape, whether it be through tree planting or quality surface materials.
- 7.29 Whilst rear courtyards and mews streets have a primary use to accommodate parking they should also integrate planting to break up the use of hard surface materials.



BUILDING HEIGHTS PLAN

CAM.0852_08-1





MOVEMENT HIERARCHY PLAN

CAM.0852_09-1

RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

Adaptability

- 7.30 The new development should be flexible enough to respond to future changes in use, lifestyle and demography. This means designing for energy and resource efficiency, creating flexibility in the use of property, public spaces and service infrastructure and introducing new approaches to transportation, traffic management and parking.
- 7.31 The development should be flexible to accommodate changes of use and circumstances through changing social, technological and economic conditions.

Sustainable building techniques

- 7.32 Where appropriate, sustainable building construction techniques will be used in line with current building regulations. Sustainable construction measures typically comprise a combination of the following;
- Improved energy efficiency through siting, design and orientation;
 - Water conservation measures;
 - An element of renewable energy production;
 - Use of building materials capable of being recycled; and
 - An element of construction waste reduction or recycling.
- 7.33 The Code for Sustainable Homes assesses the ability of a development to achieve sustainability through a package of measures. These measures relate to the whole house and have been strongly informed by the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) EcoHomes standard.
- The Code covers the following elements;
 - Energy efficiency and carbon emissions;
 - Water consumption;
 - Use and resourcing of materials;
 - Surface water run off and flood risk;
 - Waste management and recycling;
 - Minimising/reducing pollution;
 - Health and well being;
 - Management, including security and construction; and
 - Ecological protection and enhancement.

Crime prevention

- 7.34 The design proposals are based on an understanding of best practice and reference has been made to relevant documents including "Safer Places: the Planning System" and "Manual for Streets". The development is designed to create an environment that is well designed, attractive, clearly defined and well maintained. People should be able to take pride in their surroundings and feel comfortable and safe and have a sense of shared ownership and responsibility. The proposed development should be clearly defined with no ambiguity as to which areas are private, which are public, and how the two relate to one another.
- 7.35 The proposed scheme has followed the following principles:
- Routes lead directly to where people want to go;
 - All routes are necessary, serving a defined function;
 - The majority of cars are parked in the curtilage to provide optimum surveillance. The parking courts that are used are small and have natural surveillance;
 - Natural surveillance is promoted by ensuring the streets and open spaces are overlooked and well used; and
 - The ownerships and responsibilities for external space will be clearly identified and the proposals will facilitate ease of maintenance and management.
- 7.36 Landscape design is essential to achieve an environment that creates a sense of place and community identity. Landscape design in this context encompasses the planning, design and management of external spaces. Well-designed public lighting increases the opportunity for surveillance at night and sends out positive messages about the management of an area.
- 7.37 Natural surveillance in the form of doors and windows overlooking streets and pedestrian routes and therefore creating activity throughout the day and evening will be essential in creating safe and comfortable routes for the user and discourage criminal activity by increasing the risk of detection.

- 7.38 Attributes that are particularly relevant to the physical aspects of crime prevention are listed in Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention, ODPM (2004):

- Access and movement;
- Structure;
- Surveillance;
- Ownership;
- Physical protection;
- Activity; and
- Management and maintenance.



8: SUMMARY

- 8.1 The Royal Mail Delivery Office site presents an excellent opportunity to sustainably redevelop a brownfield site in the town centre of Hitchin.
- 8.2 The development will comprise a combination of A1, A3, C1 and residential land uses. The Indicative Masterplans are founded on the best practice in urban design and sustainable development with strong links to existing public transport.
- 8.3 This document has identified that it is possible to redevelop the Royal Mail Delivery Office site in a sensitive and sustainable way which gives confidence that the site can be delivered.
- 8.4 The new development will contribute towards the regeneration of Hitchin Town Centre by providing new jobs and retailing facilities as well as remaining flexible to adjacent redevelopment sites. Linkages between Portmill Lane and Hermitage Road will create more legible routes adjacent to the development.
- 8.5 The proposed development will accord with the principles of high quality urban design and best practice to create a townscape that is rich, varied and sympathetic to its environment. The aim is to achieve a high quality development with a clear identity and a strong 'sense of place'.

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Pegasus Urban Design
Pegasus House
Querns Business Centre
Whitworth Road
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 1RT

Telephone: (01285) 641717 Facsimile: (01285) 642348

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