

Design and Access Statement

Job No 760
Job Name Conversion of The Palace Cinema
Location Normandy Street, Alton, Hampshire
Date December 2023
Ref PL02

The Byre, Lantern Courtyard
The Street, Bramley
Hampshire, RG26 5DE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Site Location: The Palace Cinema, 58b Normandy Street, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 1DE
Site Area: 0.03 Hectares
Applicant: Private Client
Architect: Morse Webb Architects

This Design and Access Statement has been produced by Morse Webb Architects to support a full planning application for the conversion of Palace Cinema (Sui Generis Use Class) to create 6no. 1 and 2-bedroom residential dwellings (class C3). This statement should be read in conjunction with the associated drawings and specialist reports which accompany this application.

The applicant owns the freehold to the building and has been operating in its current form since 1995. The Palace Cinema has been making a loss for some time and the applicant is therefore unable to contribute to the upkeep of the building. Because of this, the Palace Cinema has had to close, and frequent users have found alternative cinemas in Basingstoke and Aldershot, with other smaller cinemas present in Bordon and Winchester. Unfortunately, there have been no prospects to let the cinema for any other commercial activity. The accompanying Planning Statement Appendices provides evidence that the applicant undertook a rigorous marketing exercise to make every effort to retain the building under its current use, with reference to Policy CP16. This exercise was unsuccessful, and the sites use as a Cinema has been concluded to be un-viable. The applicant is therefore seeking to convert the building to accommodate 6no. residential dwellings.

1.1 Purpose

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared to demonstrate the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development, and how issues relating to access to the proposal have been dealt with. The statement also describes the context of the site and the way in which the design responds to and develops its location. This is achieved through an understanding of setting, scale, massing, relationship to surrounding development, access, and movement.

The following Design and Access Statement has been prepared with particular reference to the following documents:

- Alton (Town Centre) guidance document (1970)
- Alton Neighbourhood Development Plan (as modified April 2021)
- East Hampshire District Local Plan: Joint Core Strategy (2014)
- East Hampshire District Local Plan: Second Review (2006)
- National Described Space Standards [NDSS] (2015)

2.0 SITE LOCATION

Alton is a market town and civil parish within East Hampshire, with a population of 17,816 as of a 2011 census. The town is located 10 miles from Basingstoke, 12 miles from Aldershot, and around 2 miles North of the South Downs

National Park border. It is surrounded by smaller villages such as Bordon, Medstead, and Chawton, all within 5 miles of Alton.

Alton is well connected to other nearby towns and cities, with a train station servicing lines travelling to Alresford and another towards London Waterloo. The A31 is located directly Southeast of Alton, providing access to Winchester and Guildford, with other A-Roads connecting Alton to Basingstoke and Southampton.

The town has a large collection of nationally Listed Buildings, primarily located along the High Street and historic Market Street, both in the centre of the town. These properties, along with additional Listed Buildings throughout the town, comprise the Alton Town Conservation Area. Most Listed Buildings are of Grade II, with a small selection being Grade II*, and a Grade I Listed Building being the Parish Church of St Lawrence.



Site Location Plan: red line indicates site location.

2.1 Existing Site

The property is located on Normandy Street, close to Alton railway station and opposite the Orchard Lane junction. Normandy Street forms part of the main throughfare through Alton town centre and is an extension of the High Street. The existing cinema is situated in an area with good public and sustainable transport links. These include Alton railway station and several local bus routes and cycle routes. The train station is located 400m away, and there are four public and private car parks available within a 180m radius, alongside off-peak parking available on Normandy Street. Mainline railway services from Alton to London Waterloo take approximately 1 hour.

The site lies within the Alton Town Centre Conservation Area and has been identified by the Alton Society as a building of local interest. However, the Local List has not been formally adopted by East Hampshire District Council. The Conservation Area boundary encompasses the buildings in Normandy Street, with extents to the rear of the site.

The site is in Flood Zone 1, meaning flooding is unlikely to occur. As the site and its surroundings are relatively flat with appropriate drainage, surface water flooding is also highly unlikely in this area.

There are several other properties that share the site. These include a small retail unit and a single 1-bed dwelling (no. 58a Normandy Street, application ref: 32440/003). The retail unit is located at the front of the site and is accessed from Normandy Street. It is currently occupied by a letting agency which has been in operation for the past few years. The single 1-bed dwelling of 58a Normandy Street was granted planning permission in 2006 and is located on the first floor, above the retail unit. This conversion sets a precedent for the repurposing of existing buildings on the site to create residential dwellings, while still retaining the appearance of the cinema when viewed from Normandy Street.

Furthermore, the addition of 4 no. 2 bed flats to the rear of the application site (1 to 4 Cinema Mews, application ref: 32440/004) shows that a more substantial residential proposal can be successfully integrated on the site, while not causing detrimental harm to the appearance of the locally renowned existing building. These recent transformations of the site have influenced the design approach for this application, enabling the new dwellings to be created without compromising the character of the existing building and therefore protecting the Conservation Area.

2.2 Existing Building

The property dates from early C20 and is arranged over three floors. The existing building comprises two cinema auditoriums; lobby spaces; projection rooms; ancillary stores located across the ground and first floors; and ancillary space for storage and staff use. The applicant is passionate about retaining the current identity of the cinema, particularly the principal elevation, which is viewed from Normandy Street, and has become highly revered by local residents.

2.3 Ecology

A bat survey was conducted which determined that there was no indication that bats were present in the existing building. It was stated that there is a low likelihood of bats in the roof space. However, because the proposed works do not affect this space, no action is required. There are therefore no ecological constraints and no bat or bird boxes are required because of the proposed works.

The accompanying Bat Assessment Report provides further information and context on the ecological characteristics of the site and existing building.

3.0 SITE PHOTOS





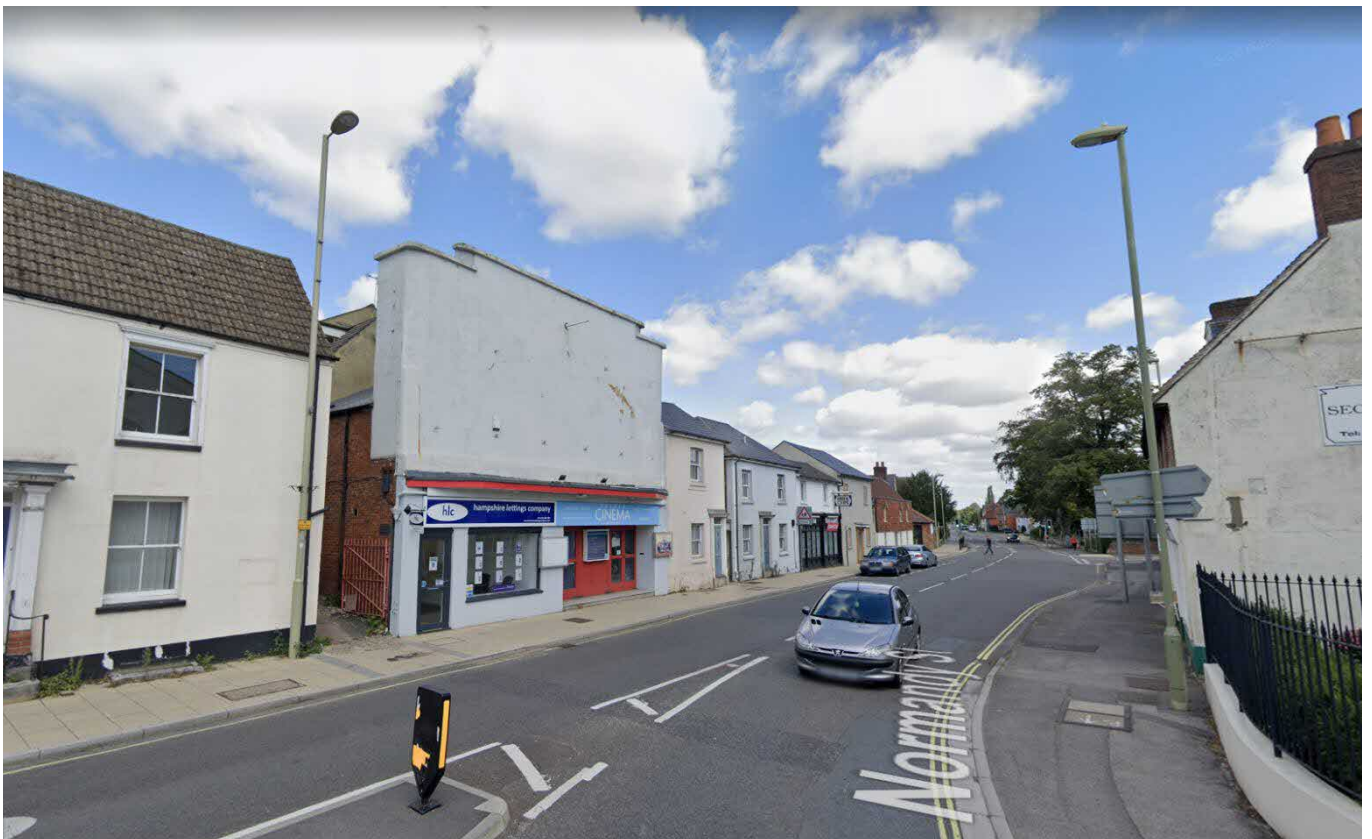
1. View of 1-4 Cinema Mews



2. View of 1-4 Cinema Mews



3. View from Normandy Street



4. View from Normandy Street

4.0 BUILT CONTEXT

The surrounding context boasts a wide variety of architectural styles and building functions. Due to the nature of the high street, many of the properties within the site's immediate vicinity are residential or commercial use. Other nearby

building types are places of worship, a mechanic's garage, hotels, and a school. All of which are within a 150m radius of the site. Normandy Street itself contains many terraced and semi-detached properties located on relatively small plots, most of which are two storeys in height. Many properties closer to the centre of the town were originally built to be three storeys high and others have been extended to this height over time, but the overall height of properties decreases to two or one storey, when located further away from the town centre. The roads surrounding the town centre are populated with detached and semi-detached properties on more generous plots.

The local vernacular has been developed over centuries through additions of different architectural styles from a variety of time periods. The scale, materiality, arrangement of fenestration, and minimal ornamental style creates a local identity that encapsulates the history of the town. The contrast between the Listed Buildings and the more contemporary additions from the C20 enable the character of the location to be simultaneously preserved and enhanced.

Most properties in Alton are very traditional in appearance, typically constructed from Hampshire red brick, clay tile roofing, and timber sash windows. Some traditional properties also have a painted brick finish or pebble dashed exterior, with some recent regeneration projects utilising a smooth exterior render over the exposed masonry. Roofs are mostly gabled or hipped, with some dormer roofs present closer to the town centre where the height of properties is an average of three storeys. Even properties with a more modern style such as the Palace Cinema still align with the appearance of the historic buildings, partly through scale and massing, but also through the incorporation of a painted exterior.





1. View of 58 Normandy Street



2. View of 62 Normandy Street



3. View of The Chapel



4. View of High Street

5.0 EXISTING SITE

5.1 Existing Building

The site in question is a large building fronting Normandy Street, stretching 40m to a rear access road which serves several nearby residential properties. The building frontage amounts to 10m in width with a side pedestrian access running the full length of the building. It is located within the defined Town Centre of Alton, amongst a variety of additional functions typically associated with a town centre such as commercial and residential. The height of the building is approximately 15m to the ridge at its highest point, spanning over three storeys. This height aligns with that of surrounding buildings in the town and properties directly adjacent to the site, placing it well within the context.

The cinema was originally constructed in the 1910's and renovated in 1930 to incorporate the Art Deco façade that now fronts Normandy Street. The overall scale and massed volume suit the immediate context, with the shop fronts at ground level reflecting those opposite and others located in the town centre. However, the lack of fenestration on upper levels contrasts that of the surrounding buildings and departs from the repeated pattern of openings present on most other surrounding buildings. Similar to the vernacular of Alton, the principal elevation lacks ornament and includes a smooth painted finish, pale in colour to match the colour palette of the neighbouring properties.

The principal elevation is constructed from concrete, with a render finish on either side of the building. In places the render has deteriorated, exposing red brick façades beneath. A combination of flat roofs and gabled roofs at different angles have been employed across the existing cinema building, however these cannot be easily seen from Normandy Street due to the Art Deco façade on the south-east elevation.

5.2 Existing Access

The existing cinema entrance and box office access from Normandy Street has steps leading up to the foyer and seating area. There is also rear access and fire escape for each auditorium via a side access lane leading back on to Normandy Street. The applicant has right of way for both pedestrians and vehicles to pass and repass along the service road to the rear of the site, which is accessed off Victoria Road.

6.0 PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

The client sought pre-application planning advice for the scheme to identify any aspects of the proposal that needed further development before submitting a full planning application. Comments were prepared by Stephen Wiltshire and received 14th July 2022, application ref: 32440/999. This advice outlined several elements of the proposal that had not been addressed in enough detail. These elements have now been resolved within the accompanying application and the relevant supporting documents. The tone of the response was positive overall, highlighting the potential for the conversion of the former cinema to residential dwellings. The officer concluded that the principle of residential development on the site was supported.

7.0 DESIGN APPROACH

Because of the site's designation within the Alton Town Conservation Area, the proposed development has been designed to have minimum impact on its setting. It is therefore proposed that the development has negligible impact on the public's perception of both the existing building and the Conservation Area.

The alterations to the principal elevation along Normandy Street are minimal, with the only change being the replacement of the two double doorways on the ground floor with a double-glazed single doorway and a single double-glazed window, constrained to the width of the previous double doorway. The sign above the existing entrance is to also be removed and two high-level windows are to be added in line with the existing openings below. The element of the proposed elevation has been designed to retain the proportionality and symmetry of the entrance, and to not differ from the existing façade too drastically. The painted concrete frontage is to be appropriately re-rendered and decorated in order to revitalise the weathered finish, while retaining its Art Deco architectural characteristics.

All proposed dwellings exceed the gross internal floor area specified in the NDSS, with several dwellings greatly exceeding the respective requirements. Most of the works are to be carried out internally. The only exceptions are the inclusion of new external windows and doors, a minor extension to the first floor, and a second-floor element that will be hidden from public view, as it will be set back behind the existing art-deco façade on the south-east elevation. Almost all of the proposed openings are on the north-east and south-west elevations and are therefore not visible from public vantage points. These windows have been carefully designed to provide ample internal daylight into all required spaces, while reducing the likelihood of any overlooking onto private spaces. There are minimal aesthetic alterations to the external fabric of the building in order to preserve the visual appearance of the existing building and protect the Conservation Area.

New window and door openings proposed are to be traditional in appearance. The accompanying proposed drawings show traditional proportions with glazing bar details, typically associated with art-deco and industrial buildings of early C20 design. The inclusion of Art Deco style window openings helps to perpetuate the characteristics of the existing building, therefore retaining the appearance of the immediate streetscape and the wider Conservation Area holistically. The renovated render finish of the south-east, south-west and north-east elevations will revitalise the tired façades and reinstate the building as a positive contribution to the Conservation Area setting.

7.1 Overlooking

Any potential issues of overlooking are minimised through the positioning and size of new windows on the south-west and north-east elevations. The windows on the north-east elevation overlook the rear amenity space of commercial units and the communal access space for residential units only. They are of a smaller size compared to windows located elsewhere in the proposal to reduce any perceived overlooking. They also incorporate raised sill heights and obscured glazing to the bottom panels to further mitigate any potential overlooking to these communal areas. Any windows on the south-west elevation that had the potential to cause a degree of overlooking have instead been located at a high level. It is therefore concluded that any potential overlooking issues have been nullified.

8.0 ACCESS

8.1 Pedestrian

The proposed new entrances to ground floor flats 1 & 3 will have private entrances, located from the side access lane and Normandy Street respectively. These access points share the location of existing access points to the cinema lobby and bin store. Proposed flat 2 will be accessed via a communal lobby at ground floor level, while flats 4, 5 & 6 will be accessed via a communal stair, located in the same location as the existing cinema fire escape.

The communal access will all be located from the side access lane to ensure the visual impact of the proposal from Normandy Street is kept to a minimum. The access lane also ensures passive surveillance as Flat 1 and 2 overlook the lane, as do the occupants of 58a Normandy Street. This side access lane will no longer be used as a public footpath and instead is to be gated and locked. It will be used strictly for access to dwellings by the residents in order to further improve the security of all dwellings.

Flats 1 & 2 are accessed from external ground floor level and will be built on one level. This will enable the dwellings to be wheelchair accessible, subject to local housing demand.

8.2 Cycle Storage

Due to the presence of nearby cycle routes and a high connectivity of sustainable public transport, additional emphasis has been placed on the use of bicycles over private car ownership. To accommodate this, the proposed development includes a secured cycle store with capacity for 12no. storage spaces, allowing for 2no. bikes per dwelling. This will enable a reduced reliance on private car ownership and increases the use of sustainable transport to further improve the environmental sustainability of the scheme. All proposed cycle storage will be located inside the property at ground floor and will be fully enclosed and secure.

The accompanying Transport Statement provides further information and context on proposed cycle storage.

8.3 Car parking

The proposal has been designed as a zero-car development. The justification for this is primarily the site's location and proximity to local facilities and transport infrastructure, including Alton train station and local bus services. The neighbouring site of 58a Normandy Street was also granted consent for the creation of a 1-bed dwelling (application ref: 32440/003) with no provision for car parking. The site is located within immediate proximity of public off-street car parks, as elaborated within section 2.1, which further justifies the proposal of zero parking.

The accompanying Transport Statement provides further reasoning and context for the zero-car development. It is therefore proposed that no car parking is justified for this development.

8.4 Refuse Storage and Collection

The existing building has a bin storage area located near the rear of the building, which has been moved closer to Normandy Street within the proposed development to improve accessibility for collection. The proposed refuse storage provides facility for 2 no. 1100L bins for the communal designation of general waste, recycling, and food waste for the 6 no. dwellings. There is additional space for smaller bins if required. There is one access for residents and collection from the access lane that runs along the side of the site, nearby to all communal and individual flat entrances, to provide suitable accessibility and shorter travel distances from each dwelling.

It is proposed that refuse vehicles will park on Normandy Street. The local planning policy does not specify a maximum distance for the collection of residential bins. For the avoidance of doubt, the drag distance from the communal bin store to Normandy Street is 15 metres. It is noted that this drag distance is less than that of the flats at Cinema Mews, approved under application ref: 32440/004. The proposal therefore improves the accessibility of refuse collection from the existing situation.

9.0 SUSTAINABILITY

9.1 Sustainability Statement

The first step in reducing the energy consumption and environmental impact of the proposed development is to consider the building fabric itself. High levels of insulation will be added to the existing and proposed external ground, walls and roof to minimise the flow of heat to and from the internal spaces. Air tightness should also be considered to ensure that a minimum of heat is lost through the fabric of the building. Finally, the ventilation strategy is key to ensure comfortable conditions for the occupants without any unnecessary requirement for cooling or additional heating. The proposed dwellings will achieve a high degree of sustainability with the intention to surpass Building Regulation compliance. This will be achieved with the use of:

- High levels of thermal insulation
- Rainwater harvesting to include storage vessels
- Air source and/or ground source heat pump, where necessary
- Photovoltaic panels, where necessary
- Appropriate layouts within the dwelling

The conversion of an existing building to create residential dwellings is inherently more sustainable than the creation of new build homes. This is because the development of brownfield sites requires less embodied carbon and makes use of existing infrastructure and close proximity of residential amenities. This is cited within policy ES1 of the Alton Neighbourhood Plan, which encourages the re-use of commercial brownfield land. The site's location and quality of the existing structure comprises an inherently sustainable location for residential development.

9.2 Materials

Where possible materials will be sourced locally and/or selected from the Green Specification Guide. Timber will ideally be sourced responsibly from forests that are sustainably managed and felled from a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified source.

9.3 Water Resources

It is incumbent upon a scheme with good sustainable credentials to limit the consumption of water within the proposed dwellings. To this end, fittings will typically be specified to meet Part G of the Building Regulations for items as follows:

- Flow restrictors and aeration taps
- Low-flow, aerated showers
- Dual-flush WCs
- Low-volume baths

10.0 CONCLUSION

The location of the site within Alton Town Conservation Area posed several specific challenges, both to the conversion of the property and the retention of heritage within a wider context. It is hoped that through completing a comprehensive and thorough interrogation of the site, the proposed scheme responds successfully to the unique characteristics of its setting. The design process has generated a design that demonstrates the sensitive preservation of the Palace Cinema itself, the image of Normandy Street, and the overall character of Alton Town Centre.

The approach to the preservation and regeneration of the Palace Cinema's façade has drawn direct influence from nearby conservation projects through the use of a rejuvenated rendered exterior. This method not only displays sensitivity and consideration of the existing building's design, but also mimics the typical materiality of the street to place the proposal comfortably within its context. The retention of the locally recognised Art Deco façade allows for both the existing streetscape to be sustained, and for the addition of 6 new dwellings in the town. This is far more favourable than the alternatives; either the destruction of a local landmark, and therefore part of Alton's identity, or for an iconic part of the town's history to be left derelict and in disrepair.