

Harpenden Royal British Legion – 21 Leyton Road, Harpenden.

The house probably started as a 17th Century two-storey, 3-bay timber framed building. The gable-end, including a blocked window at the SSE end can still be seen in the roof. The filling of this timber-framing is of wattle and daub. The original house therefore probably consisted of a central hall, with a chimney on the rear wall (later removed for the insertion of a staircase to the 19th Century rear extensions), kitchen on the north end (converted into a dining room in the 18th Century when the kitchen was rebuilt to the rear of this wing) and a Parlour at the south end. The building was first extended in the 18th Century with a lean-to extension on the NW end in Flemish bond brickwork with glazed headers, probably to form a scullery. The Parlour wing extension to the SE and the façade with gables and central porch with heavy doorway mouldings, date from the 18th Century. In the early 19th Century the kitchen wing was rebuilt with two bedrooms. Later in the 19th Century a new drawing room with further bedrooms above was added behind the parlour wing.

The building was listed in 1951 whilst it was still a private residence, all details of special interest that is referred to by English Heritage is contained in the original building and none in the later Victorian extension at the rear.

The building was acquired by the British Legion as a clubhouse in 1959 and underwent drastic changes to create bar areas and toilets. From 1963 to 1974 all the flat roof extensions were built and are present today.



Modern Extensions

Original Building

Victorian Extension

Its inhabitants

Research into the earlier owners of this Elizabethan house remains to be done but there is a list of owners from the 1660's.

In 1785 it was bought by Thomas Lawes, who had married Mary Bennet (1725-1816), whose brother John Bennet (1722-1783) had inherited the Rothamsted estate from his first cousin Thomas Wittewronge (1723-1763). Thomas and Mary's son John Bennet Lawes (1768-1822) inherited the Rothamsted estate in 1801, but continued to visit his mother at Bennets, where he extended the house considerably and added the stables for use when he entertained the Prince Regent for hunting or shooting in the 1800s.

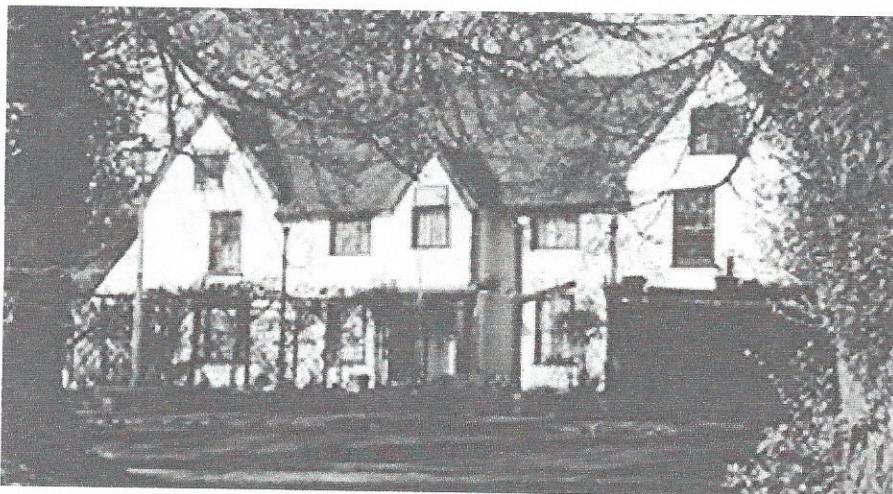


The stables built for the visits of the Prince Regent (the future George IV).

This is now Lussman's restaurant and was originally owned by the British Legion. It was sold in the early 1960's.

When John Bennet Lawes died in 1822, he left Bennetts to his daughter Marianne (elder sister of John Bennet Lawes, who inherited the Rothamsted estate and founded agricultural research at Rothamsted in 1843). Following her divorce, Marianne Warde came with her five children to live at Bennetts in 1847 until her death in 1891. She took an active part in parish life, and was particularly involved with the British School, making substantial donations, and where she was its most frequent visitor until 1885. In Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village Edwin Grey commented: "It was owing to this lady's influence and help that many a cottage boy or girl from this part of the parish was given a good start on the road to a successful career."

After 1891 Bennetts was let to various tenants. For a time in 1915 it was a convalescent home. By 1918 Gerald and Kitty Hodgson had moved to Bennetts, where they lived during the 1920s until they moved to Cornwall. Another occupant from the 1930s was Bernard Scattergood, an architect.



Bennetts in the 1920's.

For over four years we have attempted to improve our club and raise finances to achieve this. We have completed the work to the original building and the Victorian extension, the front has been re-landscaped, the car park at the rear has been re-modelled and the flats at Bennets Lodge to the very back of the site have been built.

The flat roof extensions built between 1963 and 1974 are ugly, with poor heat retention and inadequate sound insulation. The flat roofs are in a poor state of repair and well past their lifespan of 15 – 25 years. They are factory built modular units constructed by the company, Lesser Systems of Verwood. Our units are the PB4 system which were designed to sit on 9 inch foundations. Consequently we are unable to even repair the structures to the satisfaction of the building control department.

Unfortunately the Planning Officer's report clearly states that we will be unable to gain permission for a new flat roof system to replace the existing units as they are not allowed in the Conservation Area. Similarly we will not be able to gain permission for any hipped roof extensions as they would be deemed to block or mask the existing building.

We therefore spent a great deal of time to try and achieve the best solution. Dr Nicholas Doggert has provided advice, he has extensive experience throughout the country and his clients include various Oxford Colleges, several local planning authorities, the Home Office and English Heritage as a Consultant.

Dr Anthony Edwards of Hardiman & Associates LLP has been the principal Architect and has produced a design that we believe keeps the existing buildings intact and most definitely enhances the whole setting of the building, the local area and improves and enhances the Conservation Area.

We also contacted English Heritage with our proposals but they gave the same response to us as they gave to the Planning Officer which is shown on the case file and was as follows;

"Our Specialist Staff have considered the information and we do not wish to offer any comments on this occasion."

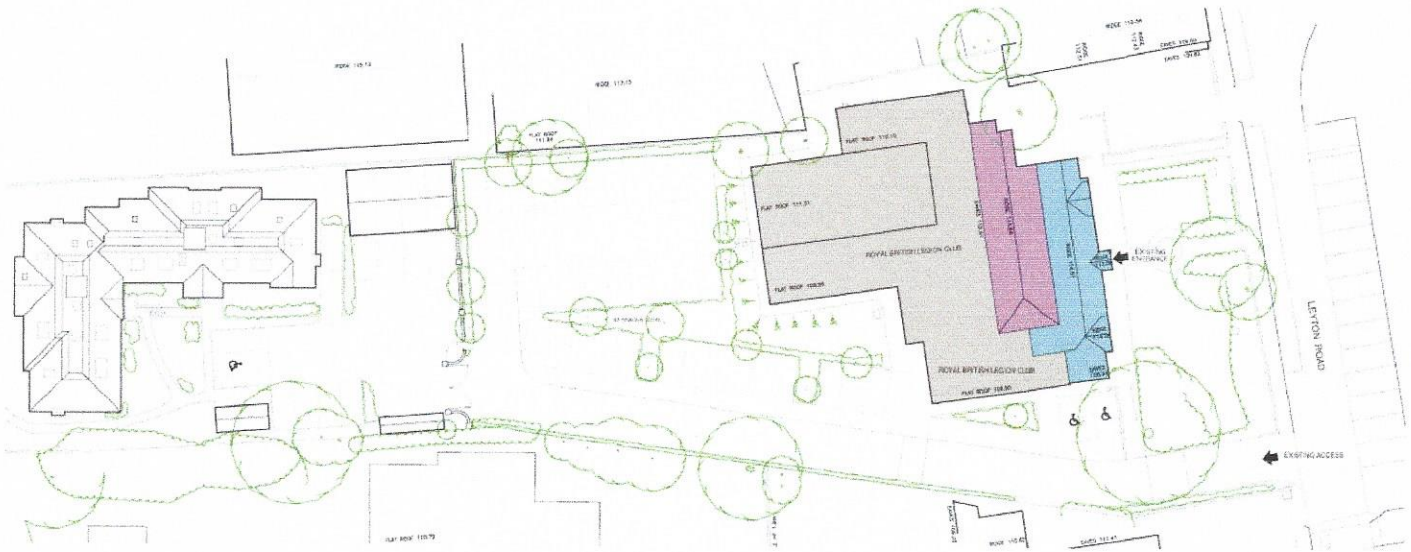
We know that this is an extremely unusual situation, the existing structures are not fit for purpose and probably should never have been given permission back in the 1960's, especially as the building was listed in 1951.

Fundamentally though, we have tried to achieve a design that does look more attractive, this has to be the overriding aim. Things cannot be left as they are, but, our function hall is of the utmost importance to us. Without it we would once again struggle to make ends meet, we have been good guardians to the building, spending a vast amount on the repairs and decorations carried out to date.

We also provide a greater community benefit to Harpenden than any other organisation, always open, 7 days a week on every day of the year. Aside from the role that the Club play in Remembrance Day and various appeals, we are home to various dance groups, many toddler and infant groups, sports clubs and associations, parent groups, charities, various festivals and will provide a function hall which is even more important following the closure of the Gleneagle and Harpenden House Hotels.

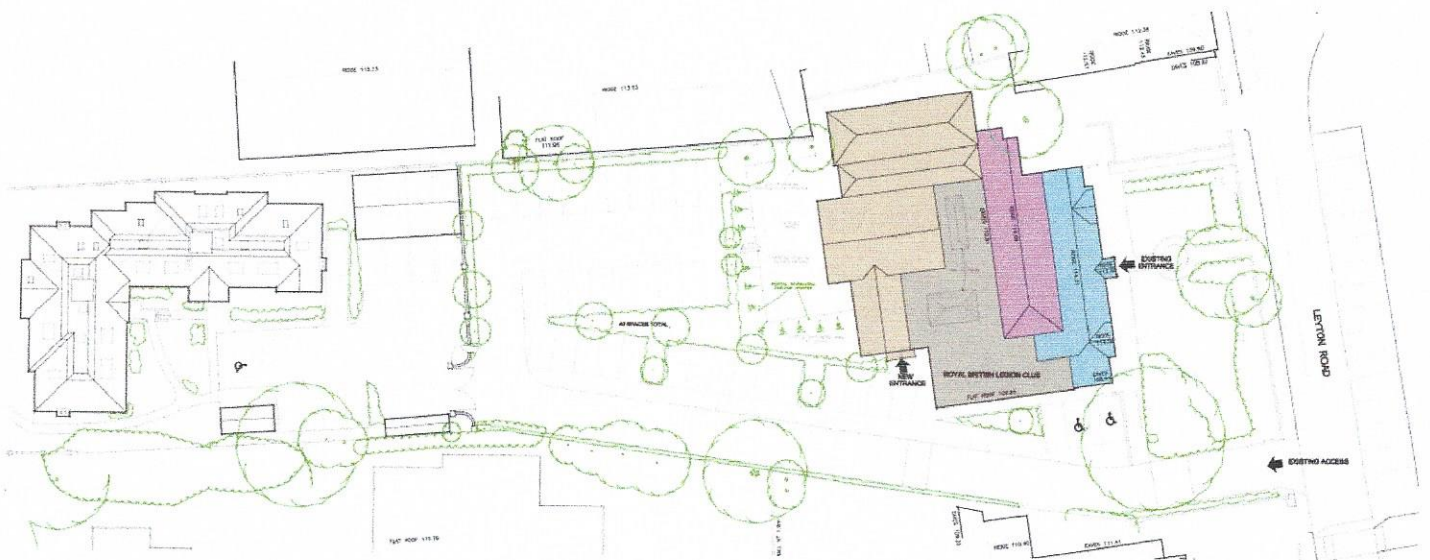
However, whilst we seek your support for our organisation, and are grateful for your support in the past, we earnestly believe that this application stands on its own merit and is the best solution for the following reasons.

Existing Situation



Original building
Victorian extension
Existing flat roof extensions

Proposed



Original building
Victorian extension
Flat roof area
Hipped roof area

This block plan hopefully demonstrates that there is almost no interference or contact with the original building and Victorian parts of the building and the views of the building are only partially obscured when viewed from the industrial estate.

Our proposal will not extend as far back as the existing and thus creates more landscaping.

Front Elevation – Existing and proposed



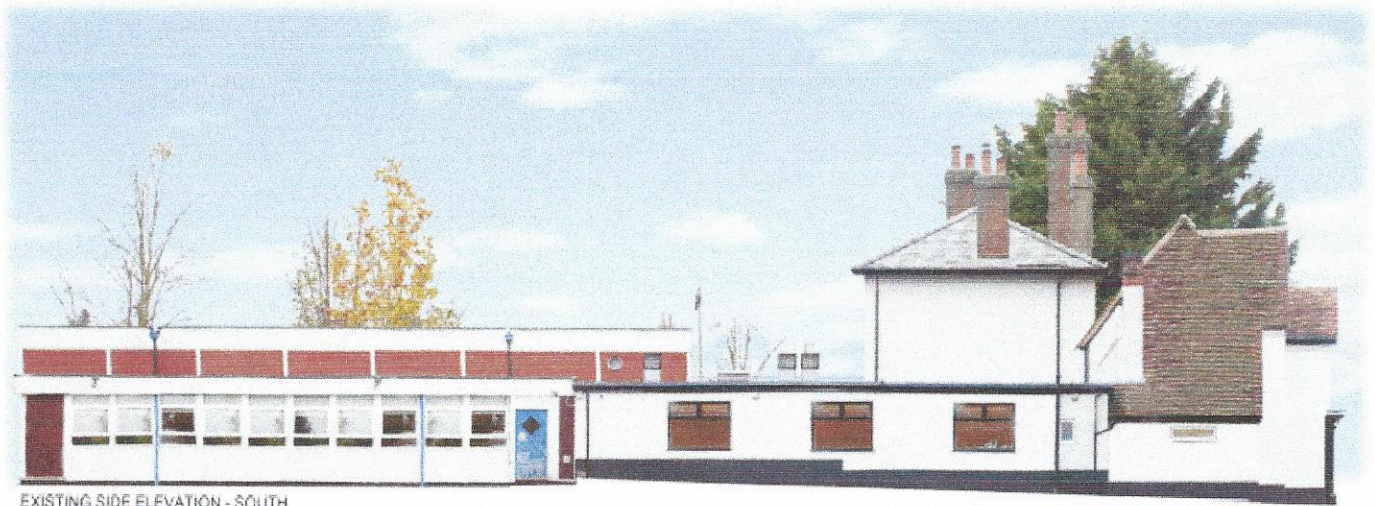
EXISTING FRONT ELEVATION - EAST



PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION - EAST

From the front elevation it is clear that there is no impact or change to the original building. This is the view from the public domain, the street scene. Extensive work has been completed to enhance this part of the Conservation Area

Side elevation as you drive into the car park at the rear



Once again, it is clear that there is no change to the existing parts of the building

Rear Elevation



EXISTING REAR ELEVATION - WEST



PROPOSED REAR ELEVATION - WEST

From this view to the rear it can be seen that there is only a small amount of the Victorian rear element that is obscured. The proposal has tried to incorporate elements from the new flats at the rear to create a harmonious change across the whole range of the buildings.

Side elevation as seen from the Industrial centre



EXISTING SIDE ELEVATION - NORTH



PROPOSED SIDE ELEVATION - NORTH

The original parts of the building are again relatively untouched or obscured.

We have concentrated the biggest change on this elevation as it offers the most limited view from the public point of view.

In conclusion, we contacted our advisors and Architects for their view on the Officer's report. We are sorry that this is late in the day but we were unable to access the report from the Design and Conservation team on the web site and had to acquire the agenda from Harpenden Town Council on Friday.

The Planning Officer's reasons for refusal are shown below with the comments from our advisors in red;

Reasons for refusal

1. The proposed development, by virtue of the size, scale, design and siting of the proposed replacement extensions, would cause substantial harm to the character, appearance and special architectural or historic interest of the listed building and its setting. The public benefits of the scheme do not outweigh the identified harm. As such, exceptional circumstances to justify the harm to the heritage asset do not exist and the proposal is contrary to paragraph 133 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy 86 of the St. Albans District Local Plan Review 1994.

Paragraph 133 notes that where proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent. – This application causes no loss or harm to the existing building.

Similarly, Policy 86 (g) of the Local Plan notes that extensions which dominate or mask the form or appearance of the original building, or otherwise detract from the listed building by reason of their scale, materials, siting or design, or conceal, obliterate or require removal of important features of the listed building will not be permitted in the absence of exceptional circumstances, and Policy 86 (b) notes that alterations involving the addition of new features (including openings) that would be detrimental to the internal or external character or appearance of a listed building should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

Once again it has been demonstrated that this proposal will not mask the form or appearance of the listed building nor does it require the removal of important features.

The officer in her report states *"There would also be an impact on the historic fabric of the listed building. At the north west corner of the building, an existing window would be blocked up, a new door would be created to access the new first floor office space and an existing door would be replaced with a window. Whilst not significant changes in themselves"*

The Officer acknowledges that they are not significant but fails to mention that the door and window in question were replaced in the 1960's and as such are modern. Hence the reason they were chosen for removal.

2. The proposed development, by virtue of the size, scale, design and siting of the proposed replacement extensions, would fail to relate to the wider area and the proposal would not preserve or enhance, but would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the Harpenden Conservation Area, contrary to the aims of Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework and the provisions of Policy 69 (General Design and Layout) and Policy 85 (Development in Conservation Areas) of the St. Albans District Local Plan Review 1994.

These proposals most certainly do relate far better to the wider area than the existing extensions. The simple fact is that the Victorian element at the rear is very plain and because of these ugly extensions do not look or feel Victorian but instead look to be part and parcel with the extensions. Our proposal will enhance the rear view and therefore enhance the Victorian range and give it more character.

A strange statement that this proposal would be detrimental to the character of the area. Maybe the officer feels that the character of the area are the industrial buildings at the rear with their corrugated roofs and bland elevations.

I think the consensus would be that this proposal does enhance the Conservation Area.

3. The proposed development, by virtue of the size, siting and design of the proposed two storey element, particularly the proximity to the party boundary and the fenestration layout on the northern elevation, would fail to secure a high standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of the adjacent land to the north, by virtue of the unacceptable levels of overlooking and the potential sterilisation of the land. The proposal is contrary to paragraph 17 (bullet point 4) of the National Planning Policy Framework and the provisions of Policy 69 of the St. Albans District Local Plan Review 1994.

This statement is wrong, misleading and suggests that the officer is struggling to find reasons for refusal.

The officer cannot in one breath state that our application should be refused because of the impact on a listed building, we are, after all, seeking to remove structures that are already there. She is fully aware that the Inn on the Green public house is also a listed building and therefore policy would not allow new building close to that listed building. The area next to the Club could not be built on. Any development would be to the rear as was the case with Bennets Lodge at the rear of the British Legion.

Similarly the Club seeks to hold events in the evenings and as such any new build would also be placed further away. In any case I would suggest that a condition can be placed that all the windows on the side elevation were at high level and thus remove any overlooking concerns. Also the roof lanterns could be changed if this is also a problem.

Similarly all materials can also be conditioned, I would prefer the new elevations to be painted brickwork to properly match the existing Victorian elevations.

I feel that I should point out that the biggest impact from our development is hidden away at the most remote part of the building. One should remember that the Inn on the Green is a listed building and one should recall how that building looked. See the synopsis below;

The old Salisbury shop in Leyton Road became Mary Ellen's Tearoom, run by Miss Mary and Miss Helen Finnie. When Miss Helen Finnie retired in the 1970s the tearoom was acquired by a brewery firm, demolished and replaced by a starkly functional brick building - the Inn on the Green. Its style so clashed with that of the neighbouring buildings that it, in turn, was pulled down and the present Inn was built in a style more sympathetic to the remaining cottages.



Original Tea Rooms



The Inn on the Green in the 1970's



The demolition of the front facade in 1992.

This was a change to remove an ugly flat roof building (above), and was replaced by a hipped roof front extension that obscured the whole front of this listed building. It also won an award, this was on the prominent front elevation and not at the rear. (Shown below is the end product).

