

PART A	
Report of: HEAD OF REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT	
Date of Committee:	16th July 2015
Site address:	Rembrandt House, Whippendell Road
Reference Number :	15/00300/FULM
Description of Development:	Proposed change of use of ground, first and second floors of mixed use commercial building to provide 43 residential units, retention of commercial units at lower ground floor; associated external elevational treatment to comprise remodeled entrances and reconfigured fenestration; associated bin stores and cycle parking.
Applicant:	Landchain Limited
Date received:	19th February 2015
13 week date (major):	21st May 2015
Agreed extension of time:	31st July 2015
Ward:	Holywell

SUMMARY AND REASONS FOR DECISION

Planning permission was granted in November 2012 for the redevelopment of the site comprising the retention of the main Rembrandt House building fronting Whippendell Road, the demolition of all other buildings on the site, and the erection of 107 dwellings. These were to be provided in 12 blocks as a mix of 34 houses, 6 maisonettes and 67 flats with the flats to be provided in the southern part of the site immediately behind the retained building and the houses and maisonettes to be provided on the northern part of the site. Following the sale of the majority of the site to Shanly Homes for the development

of the new houses and flats, a subsequent planning permission was granted in May 2014 for new house types and designs for the approved 40 houses and maisonettes, along with various amendments to the site layout and the car parking layout.

There is no objection in principle to the conversion of the existing building into residential flats. The site is within a primarily residential area, is brownfield land, and is close to public transport and local facilities. The existing building offers low quality commercial space for which there is limited demand in this location. The building is locally listed and the proposal will secure the long term use of the building whilst retaining the building's character and appearance. The proposed conversion will provide good quality accommodation for future residents and will have no adverse impacts on surrounding properties or the local area. The application makes provision for affordable housing but this is not fully in accordance with Policy HS3 as only 13 affordable units are proposed rather than the policy requirement of 15. This is due principally to the configuration of the building and not for reasons of viability. The Council's viability consultant considers the proposed development is viable and able to provide the full requirement of 15 affordable housing units in accordance with this policy. Following discussions with the Council's Housing team, an increased provision of social rented units (from 3 to 6) in place of 2 shared equity units and 1 affordable rented unit is considered to provide a sufficient housing gain to overcome the provision of 2 fewer units. This has been agreed with the applicant and can be secured by means of a s.106 planning obligation.

The Head of Regeneration and Development therefore recommends that planning permission be granted, subject to the completion of a s.106 planning obligation and appropriate conditions, as set out in the report.

BACKGROUND

Site and surroundings

The site is situated at the junctions of Whippendell Road/Hagden Lane and Whippendell

Road/King George's Avenue and has a frontage to all three roads. While the wider site has an area of 1.37 hectares, this application relates only to the retained Rembrandt House itself (0.14 hectare), a 4 storey Edwardian building that dominates the entire Whippendell Road frontage. This is a building of local interest. To the rear of this all the former extensions to the building and the various detached buildings previously within the wider site have now been demolished and the site decontaminated, cleared and levelled. Shanly Homes have recently commenced the construction of the approved houses on the northern part of the site. Rembrandt House itself has no direct vehicular access from any of the roads it adjoins but the approved layout of the wider site includes vehicular access from King Georges Avenue and car parking facilities for Rembrandt House.

The surrounding area is predominantly residential although it is very varied in character. To the east (Hagden Lane, Princes Avenue) is late 19th to early 20th century terraced housing. To the south and west (Whippendell Road, King George's Avenue) the housing is predominantly terraced and semi-detached inter-war housing, although in King Georges Avenue opposite the site are 4 blocks of 3 storey flats built in the 1980s. To the north (Cherrydale, Bramleas) the two storey housing dates from the 1970s-1990s.

Proposed development

This application relates to the retained Rembrandt House building located on the Whippendell Road frontage. The proposed development involves the conversion of the ground, first and second floors into 43 residential flats. The lower ground level will be retained for mixed commercial use, including the retention of the existing Kendo Club. The development proposes the following breakdown of units:

Unit size	No. of Units	Percentage
Studio flat	6	14%
1 bed flat	11	25%
2 bed flat	24	56%
3 bed flat	2	5%
Total	43	100%

Pedestrian access to the building will remain directly from the adjoining roads via the existing pedestrian entrances. Three of these are located on Whippendell Road, one on Hagden Lane and one on King Georges Avenue. Vehicular access will be from King Georges Avenue via the new road to be formed as part of the residential development of the wider site. This will give access to 67 car parking spaces to be formed at lower ground level immediately to the rear of the building. These arrangements remain unchanged from the previous planning permissions.

The application also involves the remodelling of the existing entrances, the replacement of the existing white uPVC windows with grey metal windows and the provision of a commercial bin store and residential cycle store in the western end of the building accessed from King Georges Avenue.

Planning history

The first development on the site is believed to have occurred in 1904, with the main phase of development occurring between 1921-1939, including Rembrandt House itself. The only significant later development on the site occurred in the 1980s.

11/00952/FULM - Planning permission granted in November 2012 for the demolition of all existing buildings and extensions to the rear of Rembrandt House; refurbishment of Rembrandt House for flexible commercial use (Class B1 and D1) including alterations to entrances; erection of 12 blocks (between 2 and 5 storeys in height) comprising 107 residential dwellings (28 x 1 bed, 46 x 2 bed, 22 x 3 bed and 11 x 4 bed); together with landscaping, ancillary structures and 215 car parking spaces.

13/01156/NONMAT – Non-material amendments to the elevations of Blocks J-M.

13/01175/NONMAT – Non-material amendments to the rear elevation of Rembrandt House, the siting of the commercial bin stores and the retained electricity sub-station (provision of secure compound and parking space).

14/00262/FULM – Planning permission granted in May 2014 for the construction of 40 dwelling houses comprising 12 no. 2 bed houses, 28 no. 3 bed houses and minor amendments to the car parking layout, as an amendment to the house types and car parking layout approved under planning permission ref.11/00952/FULM.

14/00263/NONMAT – Non-material amendments to the elevations of Rembrandt House.

14/00991/VAR – Planning permission granted in October 2014 for the variation of Conditions 2 and 19 of planning permission ref. 14/00262/FULM for the construction of 40 dwelling houses comprising 12 no. 2 bed houses, 28 no. 3 bed houses and minor amendments to the car parking layout, as an amendment to the house types and car parking layout approved under planning permission ref. 11/00952/FULM. Amendments to the car parking layout, amendments to the bin store provision to provide communal stores and amendments to the house designs; and to the time period for the submission of Code for Sustainable Homes final certificates.

14/00992/VAR - Planning permission granted in October 2014 for the variation of Conditions 2 and 24 of planning permission ref. 11/00952/FULM for the demolition of all existing buildings and extensions to the rear of Rembrandt House; refurbishment of Rembrandt House for flexible commercial use (Class B1 and D1) including alterations to entrances; erection of 12 blocks (between 2 and 5 storeys in height) comprising 107 residential dwellings (28 no. 1 bed, 46 no. 2 bed, 22 no. 3 bed and 11 no. 4 bed); together with landscaping, ancillary structures and 215 car parking spaces. Amendments to the car parking layout and the elevational design of the blocks of flats; and to the time period for the submission of Code for Sustainable Homes final certificates.

Relevant Policies

National Planning Policy Framework

Section 1 Building a strong, competitive economy

Section 4 Promoting sustainable transport

Section 6 Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes

Section 7 Requiring good design

**Hertfordshire Waste Core Strategy And Development Management Policies
Document 2011-2026**

No relevant policies.

Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review 2002-2016

No relevant policies.

Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31

- SS1 Spatial Strategy
- SD1 Sustainable Design
- SD2 Water and Wastewater
- SD3 Climate Change
- HS1 Housing Supply
- HS2 Housing Mix
- HS3 Affordable Housing
- T2 Location of New Development
- T3 Improving Accessibility
- T5 Providing New Infrastructure
- INF1 Infrastructure Delivery and Planning Obligations
- UD1 Delivering High Quality Design

Watford District Plan 2000

- SE7 Waste Storage and Recycling in New Development
- T10 Cycle Parking Standards
- T21 Access and Servicing
- T22 Car Parking Standards
- T24 Residential Development
- H10 Educational and Community Facilities

- L8 Public Open Space
- L9 Children's Play Space

Supplementary Planning Documents and Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes

Residential Design Guide (2014)

SPG10 Open Space Provision

CONSULTATIONS

Neighbour consultations

Letters were sent to 56 properties in King Georges Avenue, Whippendell Road, Princes Avenue, Hagden Lane and Bramleas. Thirteen letters have been received, including one from the Kodokan Kendo Club. The following comments have been made by those making individual representations:-

- Increased traffic in congested residential area.
- Inadequate local infrastructure to serve new flats.
- Lack of provision for Kodokan Kendo Club (toilets).
- Increased traffic congestion on Whippendell Road and Rickmansworth Road.
- Inadequate parking provision on-site for new residents. Will increase on-street parking. Existing on-street parking already fully used.
- Loss of commercial units.
- Development to rear has already increased from 107 to 147 dwellings.

The Kodokan Kendo Club has raised the following objections to the proposal:

- Loss of common area including toilets.
- Kendo generates noise that will conflict with the residential flats proposed above the club's lower ground floor unit (i.e. when windows open during warm weather).
- Inadequate car parking provision. Only 5 spaces allocated for remaining commercial uses in lower ground floor.
- development is overcrowded.

- Loss of commercial units for future business use.
- Poor layout of proposed flats. Limited corridors. No balconies or communal space. Only 2 lifts in the building serving only 10 of the proposed flats. *[Note: in fact, 16 flats will be served by these 2 lifts]*

Advertisements in local paper/site notices

Three site notices were displayed outside the site on 3rd March 2015 and a public notice also appeared in the Watford Observer on 6th March 2015.

Consultations

Environment Agency

No comments.

Thames Water

Thames Water would advise that with regard to sewerage infrastructure capacity, we would not have any objection to the planning application.

Sport England

The site is not considered to form part of, or constitute a playing field as defined in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010, therefore Sport England has considered this a non-statutory consultation. Sport England has assessed the application in the light of Sport England's Land Use Planning Policy Statement 'Planning for Sport Aims and Objectives':

- 1) To prevent the loss of sports facilities and land along with access to natural resources used for sport.
- 2) To ensure that the best use is made of existing facilities in order to maintain and provide greater opportunities for participation and to ensure that facilities are sustainable.
- 3) To ensure that new sports facilities are planned for and provided in a positive and integrated way and that opportunities for new facilities are identified to meet current and future demands for sporting participation.

In summary, the proposal involves converting the majority of the floors at Rembrandt House from commercial to residential and retaining the commercial units on the lower ground floor. One of the units (Unit 3) on the lower ground floor is occupied by Kodokan Kendo Club which has a purpose built dojo for the sport. The club is the only kendo club in the Watford area and has over 40 members including 20 junior members. The club has been established in the area for over 30 years and is of strategic importance for the sport.

The peak use of the club's facilities is evenings and weekends when the club's facilities are intensively used. The introduction of residential uses into Rembrandt House will therefore result in the club's activities taking place when the majority of the residents will be at home which introduces potential for residential amenity conflict. At present, the club co-exists successfully with the other commercial units because the hours of use are complementary. While no objection is made to the principle of the majority of the floors being converted to residential, based on consideration of the planning application there are concerns that the proposal in its current form may prejudice the use of the kendo club and have an adverse affect on the amenity of the proposed residential units. The concerns are as follows:

- **Loss of Access to Toilets:** The club currently has access to male and female toilets on the first floor of Rembrandt House as their unit does not have its own toilets. The conversion of the first floor to residential will result in the loss of access to these facilities. Without access to toilets, the club will not be able to operate effectively for practical reasons and it would have an adverse affect on the retention and recruitment of club members. A solution to this would be for the development to provide toilets for the club in a communal area serving the commercial units on the lower ground floor. In its current form, the proposal does not appear to make any toilet provision for the club and therefore this would have a major prejudicial affect on the operation of the club. Our concerns on this would be reviewed if amendments could be made to the scheme to incorporate appropriate toilets

facilities for serving the club which they would have access to under the terms of their lease.

- Car Parking: Planning permissions on adjoining land are understood to make provision for 67 car parking spaces for the commercial units in Rembrandt House in a lower ground car park that would replace the current temporary car park. As set out in paragraph 5.30 of the Planning Statement, 62 spaces would be allocated for the residential element of Rembrandt House, with only 5 spaces to serve all of the commercial units.

The club have advised that during peak periods there is a need for around 20 parking spaces as the majority of the club's members travel to the site by car. This increases to around 40 spaces when the club hosts events. Even if the club was able to use all of the 5 allocated spaces for commercial units, there would still be a significant shortfall in terms of meeting their needs. As residents and club members will be seeking to use the car park at the same time during evenings and weekends this offers potential for conflict between the club and residents and may result in overspill onto the internal estate roads and the adjoining roads outside of Rembrandt House which have parking restrictions. Inadequate on-site parking provision will make the club less attractive for current and potential members.

The previously permitted scheme would have allocated all of the 67 parking spaces for users of the existing commercial space in Rembrandt House which is more likely to have been adequate for the club as their use of the car parking would have complemented the use of the other business units. The current scheme will be different as peak demand for parking by the club and residential will be in the same period. The planning application documents do not appear to account for the scale or nature of the club's parking needs.

This could be addressed if the parking assessment is reviewed to fully account for the club's needs with a view to increasing the amount of spaces on-site that the club has access to.

- Noise: Due to the nature of kendo, it does generate noise from participants and would not be considered a 'good neighbour' to residential uses. At present, this is not an issue as the club use takes place when other commercial users are not on site. However, the introduction of residential to the majority of the building will introduce a conflict.

I have considered the submitted noise strategy and no assessment seems to have been made of the impact on residential amenity of noise generation from the club's unit when in use by the club. Noise from the club will be audible internally to the upper floors and externally when windows in the club's unit are open. As no noise assessment of this use has been undertaken, there are no specific mitigation measures proposed for addressing the issue such as sound insulation between the floors and a mechanical ventilation system to reduce the need to open windows in the club's unit. Without any assessment or associated mitigation, there is a concern that the noise generated by the club will lead to complaints from residents which in turn will result in pressure being placed on the Council to restrict the club's activities through noise abatement legislation. This could prejudice the club from using the unit and it would be unreasonable to expect the club to fund and implement noise mitigation measures at a later date to address such concerns, especially as the options for retrospective mitigation are likely to be more limited and expensive.

To address this concern, an objective noise assessment should firstly be undertaken which assesses the internal and external noise impact from the club when the club's activities are taking place. The results of such an assessment should then be used for informing the nature of mitigation measures required to help ensure that the club and residents can co-exist without an unacceptable

residential amenity impact. The proposed measures would then need to be implemented as part of any planning permission.

Individually and collectively, I am concerned that the proposals in their current form will prejudice the use of the kendo club's activities. Sport England considers proposals that will prejudice the use of a sports facility in the same way as those that would result in the direct loss of facilities. Paragraphs 70 and 74 of the NPPF also seek to protect sports facilities and I consider the proposals would be contrary to Government planning policy in this regard.

As set out above, Sport England does not object to the principle of Rembrandt House being converted to residential, our focus is on ensuring that the scheme incorporates adequate mitigation to safeguard the kendo club and avoid the proposals prejudicing its continued use. The inclusion of such mitigation will also be in the interests of the occupants of the residential units as well as the club so should be accounted for in terms of residential amenity.

In conclusion, Sport England therefore considers that the proposal conflicts with Objective 1 of its Planning for Sport Aims and Objectives as well as the NPPF and would therefore **object** to the planning application in its current form. However, potential is considered to address these concerns if the issues identified are fully considered and addressed as suggested.

Hertfordshire County Council (Highway Authority)

Notice is given under article 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 that the Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority does not wish to restrict the grant of permission.

Comments

Access: The application form indicates the development does not involve a new access or alteration of an existing access to the highway for the proposal. Access to the basement

car parking area will be by way of the new estate roads and will be constructed for the approved development (at the rear of Rembrandt House).

Parking: The applicant states that 56 parking spaces would be available for use by residents and the visitors to 43 apartments.

Traffic Impact; The proposals will not affect highway flow and safety.

Conclusion: As a consequence Hertfordshire County Council as highway authority doesn't recommend refusing this application.

Hertfordshire County Council (Development Services)

Further to our discussion I have been informed by the Fire and Rescue Service that the provision of fire hydrants will be necessary to minimise the impact of the proposed development.

A Section 106 legal agreement would be the County Council's preferred method of securing fire hydrants. However, it is recognised that Watford Borough Council is intending to scale back the use of such agreements. If a Section 106 agreement is not otherwise anticipated for this development we would seek the inclusion of a condition to the planning permission.

Environmental Services

The report shows that the main noise issue is traffic noise, that it can be controlled through better spec windows, however, cooling by natural ventilation will not be possible on Whippendell Road and Hagden Lane facades and meet the noise criteria. This will mean mechanical cooling to those units, I do not know if this has been included in the application, but I think it should be. This may not cause a problem for neighbours, as there is apparently a plant room that can house the condensers. There should be a design spec by a HVAC specialist, CIBSE, on what this looks like.

Planning Policy

These comments relate principally to the loss of employment space involved in this planning application.

It is noted that the premises has been marketed unsuccessfully for a number of years. The marketing evidence included with the application notes that this location cannot compete with the opportunities available in the town centre and refers to alternative premises such as Hannay House and Gresham House in Clarendon Road and Clarendon House and Shire House in Bridle Path, which offer better space in a more convenient location.

The Core Strategy, adopted in 2013, identifies the town centre, the Health Campus, Watford Junction and the Western Gateway as key locations for employment growth, along with growth within the designated employment areas. These employment areas are currently designated by the Watford District Plan 2000 Policy E1, with some amendments being proposed in Local Plan Part 2. Rembrandt House does not fall within a designated area, either current or proposed. Nor does it fall within one of the other identified areas in which jobs growth is expected to be focussed. Policy E6 of the Watford District Plan 2000, which protected unallocated employment sites, was deleted on adoption of the Core Strategy. There is therefore now no current policy requiring employment on this site to be protected.

However, based on recent evidence which suggests a higher need for employment space than expected at the time the Core Strategy was adopted, Local Plan 2 now includes a policy (EMP7) which would reintroduce protection of employment space. Although the emerging policy can be afforded little weight at this point, the recent EGDA evidence on need for additional employment space is a material consideration so I have still considered whether the proposal would comply with the emerging policy. The emerging policy E7 says that loss of B class employment space outside of designated employment areas will only be permitted where:

- the most up to date evidence suggests there is a surplus of B class employment space (it does not); or
- replacement provision is provided within Watford (there is no suggestion that this is the case); or
- the property has been vacant for at least 6 months and there is clear evidence to show it cannot be reused or redeveloped for employment use in the medium term;
- and the proposal is compatible with adjoining uses.

Considering the last 2 points, the fact that Rembrandt House is a locally listed building we would wish to retain means that the improvement and redevelopment opportunities are limited. The parts of the premises to be converted have been subject to improvements and have been vacant for more than 6 months. The marketing evidence is clear that this is not a preferred location for occupiers, and that even with Croxley Rail Link up and running in a few years time there would still be issues such as delivery access which would be difficult to resolve. The surrounding area is already residential, and residential use is permitted on the rest of the site.

On balance, I would have no objection to this site being converted to residential use.

APPRAISAL

In accordance with s.38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Development Plan for Watford comprises:

- (a) *Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31*;
- (b) the continuing “saved” policies of the *Watford District Plan 2000*;
- (c) the *Hertfordshire Waste Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document 2011-2026*; and
- (d) the *Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review 2002-2016*.

Land allocation

The site lies within a primarily residential area on the Proposals Map of the Watford District Plan and, therefore, redevelopment for residential use is acceptable in principle. The development of the majority of the site for residential purposes has also been established through the granting of planning permission ref. 11/00952/FULM in November 2012.

Employment policies

At the time planning permission ref. 11/00952/FULM was granted in 2012, Policy E6 of the Watford District Plan was a relevant consideration. This sought to retain existing employment uses outside of the designated employment areas, subject to certain criteria being met. This policy was deleted when the Core Strategy was adopted in January 2013. The Core Strategy recognised the need to deliver 7,000 additional jobs in the Borough to 2031 but also sought to provide these jobs within the special policy areas that were considered to be the most suitable and sustainable areas for redevelopment to provide modern employment floorspace. This reflects policy in the NPPF which states that planning policies should avoid the long term protection of sites in employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. In the case of Rembrandt House, there is limited opportunity to improve the quality of accommodation for employment use given the configuration of the building and the fact that it is locally listed. The submitted marketing information illustrates the lack of interest in the building for employment use over the past 3 years.

The Policy team in their comments have made reference to the emerging employment policy EMP7 in the Local Plan Part 2. Although this cannot be given significant weight at the present time, it does include criteria against which applications should be considered. This includes the building being vacant for more than 6 months with clear evidence it cannot be reused or redeveloped for employment use in the medium term. Having regard to the context of the site, the marketing evidence and the local listing of the building, they have raised no objection to the proposed conversion to residential use.

Heritage issues

The retained Rembrandt House building fronting Whippendell Road is a building of local interest. Any proposal should therefore seek to retain the character and appearance of the building as much as practicable. The main changes to the building are as follows:

- i) Replacing the existing slate tile roof with a new roof of fibre cement tiles with slate appearance.
- ii) Replacing existing white, uPVC windows with new aluminium windows painted dark grey. The original windows to the building would most likely have been metal rather than timber on an industrial building of this scale.
- iii) Replacing the existing modern timber doors with glazed doors to give light to the entrance lobbies.
- iv) Altering a small number of the existing windows to reflect localised adjustments to internal floor levels within the building and the new residential use.

Localised repairs will also be made to the existing brickwork where necessary. The principal, central entrance on Whippendell Road is marked by a decorated tympanum and frieze, part of which was damaged in a recent storm. The part of the frieze that blew off was salvaged and has been retained and this is to be restored as part of the proposed works. Overall, all of the proposed works will retain the character and appearance of the building and are considered acceptable.

Other minor works are likely to be required as part of the conversion works, including vents to boilers and mechanical ventilation systems. These could potentially have a negative impact on the appearance of the building if they are not carefully sited and designed to minimise their visibility. A condition can be used to secure these details. The applicant has also stated an intention to install a communal TV aerial and satellite dish to mitigate the need for multiple aerials and dishes on the building, to retain the buildings appearance. This can also be secured by condition.

Housing policies

Policy HS1 of the Core Strategy lists some of the criteria that will be taken into account in assessing the suitability of windfall sites for residential use. In this case, the site is brownfield land, is close to an existing local centre (the western end of Whippendell Road and the new Morrison's store on Ascot Road), is not at risk of flooding (Flood Zone1, low risk), is close to public transport and is not allocated for other uses. Furthermore, the heritage significance of the building can be retained and the site has no biodiversity or landscape significance.

Policy HS2 gives guidance on the mix of dwelling sizes. For a conversion of an existing building such as this, only flats can be provided. Within this constraint, the proposal does provide a good mix of dwelling sizes, including studio flats, 1 bed and 2 bed flats, and a small number of 3 bed flats though incorporating mezzanine levels within the existing roof structure. The Residential Design Guide gives guidelines for minimum unit sizes for new dwellings. The breakdown of flat sizes proposed is as follows:

Unit size	RDG floorspace	Proposed floorspace
Studio flat	37m ²	49-71m ²
1 bedroom flat	37m ²	47-53m ²
2 bedroom flat	61m ²	61-93m ²
3 bedroom flat	74m ²	86-88m ²

This is considered to be an acceptable and appropriate mix of units.

Policy HS3 requires all developments of 10 units or more to provide 35% of the units as affordable housing. The proposed development of 43 units would therefore require 15 of these units to be for affordable housing. The applicant submitted a viability appraisal with the application which sought to demonstrate that it was not viable for the development to provide any affordable housing. This was reviewed by consultants, Adams Integra, on behalf of the Council and their conclusion was that the development is viable with the full provision of 15 affordable housing units based on the tenure mix on Policy HS3 (65%

affordable rent, 20% social rent and 15% shared equity). This tenure mix breaks down as 10 affordable rented units, 3 social rented units and 2 shared equity units. Following further discussions with the applicant and their consultant, the applicant agreed to provide affordable housing as part of the scheme.

The affordable housing proposed by the applicant is 13 units, rather than the full 15 units. This has principally arisen through the internal configuration of the building and the desire of both the applicant and potential registered providers to avoid mixing private and affordable units within the building. The building is served by 5 stair/lift cores, 3 on the Whippendell Road frontage, one on the Hagden Lane frontage and one on the King Georges Avenue frontage. The 3 cores on Whippendell Road serve 10, 9 and 11 units respectively, the Hagden Lane core serves 6 units and the King Georges Avenue core serves 7 units. The central core on Whippendell Road that serves 9 units forms the principle entrance feature to the building, which would be most appropriate for the private units, and also incorporates a 3 bed unit which is not considered to be desirable as an affordable unit. Consequently, there is no suitable configuration of cores and units served that can provide 15 affordable units separate from the private cores/units. The proposal is that the two end cores, on Hagden Lane and King Georges Avenue, are used to provide a total of 13 affordable units. The breakdown of units would be as follows:

	Studio	1 bed	2 bed
Hagden Lane frontage	0	2	4
King Georges Avenue frontage	1	0	6
Total	1	2	10

It has been agreed with the Housing team that the 6 flats off Hagden Land will be social rented and the 7 flats off King Georges Avenue will be affordable rented. This will provide a tenure mix of 46% social rented and 54% affordable rented. This will double the number of social rented units that would be provided with a policy compliant mix (from 3 to 6) and provide valuable social rented units that are difficult to secure. The predominance of 2 bed units will also provide additional units for which there is greatest demand in the borough.

Overall, the Housing team consider the additional social rented units and the predominance of 2 bed units provide significant housing benefits to overcome the provision of 2 fewer affordable units. On balance, therefore, the affordable housing provision, whilst not fully in accordance with Policy HS3, is considered to be acceptable in this case.

The majority of the flats will be single aspect, facing either south (front) or north (rear) but with some dual aspect units. The predominance of single aspect units is due to the narrow footprint of the building and the multiple stair cores serving the building, which are to be retained. Although the north facing units will receive little or no direct sunlight, with this exception, all of the flats will have good levels of outlook, natural light and privacy. As this is a conversion of an existing building, it will not be possible to provide any private amenity space. Due to the local listing of the building, balconies have also not been proposed in order to maintain the character and appearance of the building.

The proposed flats may potentially experience noise nuisance from a number of sources. These include road traffic noise on Whippendell Road and Hagden Lane in particular, noise from the Kendo club at lower ground floor level (this is discussed in a later section of the report) and noise from the proposed basement plant room. In the latter two cases, noise is only likely to be experienced by flats at ground floor level directly above these facilities.

A Noise Control Strategy has been submitted with the application. An assessment of road traffic noise at the facades of the building recorded the highest average (this is not an arithmetic average but the sound pressure equivalent to the acoustic energy of the fluctuating signal) and maximum noise levels on the Whippendell Road façade and the two end facades (facing Hagden Lane and King Georges Avenue). The rear façade recorded the lowest levels due to the screening of the building itself. Based on these recorded levels, the report proposes minimum noise attenuation performance for the proposed new windows to ensure the recommended internal noise levels as set out in BS 8233:2014 and the World Health Organisation's 'Guidelines for Community Noise' (1999)

are achieved. The report concludes that the required levels of attenuation can be achieved with the use of double glazed windows subject to the appropriate noise performance specification depending on which façade the window is located on and what room type it serves (with a higher specification required for bedroom windows). Details of the noise performance of the proposed windows can be secured by condition.

The Strategy also considers the issue of ventilation as the noise performance of the windows will only be achieved with the windows closed. For those windows on the rear elevation, it is acceptable to ventilate the rooms naturally by opening the windows. For the front and end facades experiencing higher noise levels, opening the windows would give rise to unacceptable internal noise levels. As such, it is proposed that these flats should be ventilated by a mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR). This would allow the flats to be ventilated without the need to open the windows.

The proposal incorporates a plant room at basement level towards the eastern end of the building. This is principally to house water boosters that will be need to maintain adequate water pressure to all the flats. It may also house other plant and equipment. No assessment has been undertaken at present regarding this plant room as the plant to be installed has not yet been selected. A condition is, therefore, appropriate to secure details of the proposed plant and noise levels generated.

Impact on neighbouring properties

There are no extensions proposed to the existing building as part of the proposal. The new blocks of flats approved to the north (rear) of the building are sited 22m away from the building, meeting the minimum back-to-back distance within a new development as set out in the Residential Design Guide. As such, the proposed conversion will have no additional impacts on the approved flats to the rear. The proposal will also have no additional impacts on any surrounding existing properties.

Highways, servicing and parking

As part of planning permission ref. 11/00952/FULM, new access arrangements were

approved to serve the development, including the retained Rembrandt House. These included new road junctions on Hagden Lane and King Georges Avenue, a new internal access road linking the two junctions (with bollards across the road mid-way along its length to prevent through traffic), and an access spur, delivery bay and 67 parking spaces at lower ground level to serve the retained Rembrandt House. These access arrangements are to be delivered by Shanly Homes as part of their development of the wider site and are satisfactory to serve the proposed conversion of the building to residential use.

Under planning permission ref. 11/00952/FULM, the traffic implications of the proposed 67 parking spaces to serve Rembrandt House were assessed and considered acceptable. This assessment was based on the Class B1 use of the building and considered the impacts during the morning and evening peak periods. The proposed residential use will not generate any additional peak time traffic movements and will not, therefore, create any additional impacts compared to the commercial use of the building.

In respect of car parking, the proposed allocation of spaces is 57 spaces for the residential units and 10 spaces for the commercial units. Based upon the maximum car parking standards in the Watford District Plan, the maximum number of spaces for the residential flats would be 61.75 spaces. For the retained commercial uses (865m²), the site is within Parking Zone 3 and the maximum number of parking spaces considered acceptable for a Class B1 commercial use is 18.5 spaces. The residential provision is close to the maximum considered acceptable whilst the commercial provision is just over half the maximum. This is not, in itself, a problem as the surrounding roads, with the exception of King Georges Avenue, are within a controlled parking zone and the development can be excluded from the controlled parking zone to ensure future occupiers (both residential and commercial) will not be entitled to permits to park on-street. This, of course, will not apply to King Georges Avenue. This level of provision is considered acceptable.

The site is in close proximity to bus stops located outside the site on Whippendell Road which are served by routes 320 and 324, both of which include Watford Junction and the

town centre. The site is also within a short walking distance of the proposed new Metropolitan Line station at Ascot Road forming part of the Croxley Rail Link project, which will link Watford Junction to central London. Overall, the level of parking provision is considered to be acceptable.

A cycle store is included within the building for the proposed flats. This is located at the western end of the building with direct access from King Georges Avenue. This will incorporate double stacking units to accommodate 44 cycles and is acceptable.

With regard to the storage of refuse and recycling, the previously approved commercial bin stores, sited at the western and eastern ends on the rear elevation, are of sufficient size for the bin storage requirements of the proposed flats. A new bin store for the commercial units at lower ground floor is provided within the building adjacent to the residential cycle store, with direct access from King Georges Avenue. This is also acceptable.

The Kodokan Kendo Club

Both Sport England and the Kodokan Kendo Club have raised a number of objections to the proposal and these will be addressed in detail in this section.

i) Loss of car parking provision

The club meets during weekday evenings and at weekends when the commercial uses previously on the site were generally not operating. As such, they have generally used the uncontrolled parking spaces of the commercial uses during these times. They have stated that when they hold events, they require up to 40 spaces for parking. However, the site owners have confirmed that under the terms of their lease, the club have no allocated parking spaces and have no legal right to be using the parking spaces of other commercial operators. Whilst this has evidently been occurring on a regular basis in recent years, it is not correct to consider their use of these spaces as lawful or that, as a result of the proposals, the club will 'lose' parking spaces. Equally, there is no requirement either legally or under planning policy for the applicant to provide any specific number of

spaces for the club.

Under the Council's current maximum parking standards, for a Class D2 use with a floorarea of approx. 120m², the maximum provision of 1 space per 15m² would be 8 spaces. The applicant has stated that they propose to allocate 57 spaces to the residential units and 10 spaces to the three commercial units at lower ground level. These will be offered on a leased basis to those who wish to secure them. Any spaces not leased will be retained as visitor spaces. The kendo club will therefore have the opportunity to secure some spaces should they wish to do so.

ii) Loss of toilet facilities

The lower ground floor unit occupied by the club has no toilet facilities. The club currently use toilet facilities on the first floor of the building with the consent of the applicant, although, as with the car parking, there is no legal right within the club's lease to use these facilities. In response to the objections raised, the applicant has proposed the provision of new toilet facilities at lower ground floor level that will be for the use of the club.

iii) Noise from the kendo club

Kendo is a traditional Japanese martial art involving swords but in the modern day is practiced using large bamboo sticks. The participants wear body armour in a traditional Japanese style. The sport is very physical and generates noise through the shouting of the participants and through the bamboo sticks hitting against each other and against the participants' body armour. The only ventilation available to the unit the club occupies is through opening the windows. There is potential, therefore, for noise from the club to be heard in the proposed flats above the unit, both through the floor structure and through the open windows.

Following objections from the kendo club, the applicant commissioned a noise survey of the club when operational. The survey involved recording noise measurements both within the club room and on the ground floor above the club room during normal club use. The findings of the survey within the club room were that activity noise levels were high with

significant short term maximum noise level events. In the room above, noise transfer was audible through the floor itself (due to its low density), via the perimeter edge to the wall junction, and via the structural steel beams. The minimum recommended provision would be to control noise levels within the proposed flats above the kendo club to below 45dB L_{Amax} . This would, however, still be likely to lead to noise complaints from peak noise events. The practical option is to control noise levels to 35 dB L_{Amax} which would correspond to the typical background noise level within a flat. Whilst peak noise events would still be audible, they would have low impact. It is considered impracticable to ensure that all noise events would be inaudible (less than 20 dB L_{Amax}).

The conclusion of the survey report is that noise within the flats above the kendo club should be controlled to typical background noise levels of 35 dB L_{Amax} . This could be achieved through various options or a combination of options including mass barrier ceiling systems, concrete floated floors, de-coupling of the building structure and enhanced above slab floor build up. The final mitigation scheme can be secured by condition.

Sustainability

The existing building is very inefficient in terms of its thermal insulation and energy use with high emissions of carbon dioxide. As a result of the conversion, the thermal values of the building will be very significantly improved and the carbon dioxide emissions significantly reduced, from 41.00kg CO₂/m² per year to 25.66kg CO₂/m² per year. It is proposed that the requirements of the Building Regulations will be exceeded. In terms of water use, the applicant has stated their commitment to achieving a water consumption rate of less than 105 litres/person/day for the residential units through the use of water efficient fittings. It is also proposed that the site will be registered with the Considerate Constructors Scheme and will include a Site Waste Management Plan, measures which will help to minimise the impact of the proposal on the local community and the wider environment. All of these measures accord with the aims of policies SD1, SD2, SD3 and SD4 of the Core Strategy.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Council's CIL charging schedule was implemented on 1st April 2015 and, as such, the proposed scheme will be liable for CIL charges. The CIL charge covers a wide range of infrastructure and community facilities including education, childcare, libraries, youth facilities, open space, children's playspace, transport and healthcare. Under the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010, payments towards infrastructure and facilities covered by CIL can no longer be sought by section 106 planning obligations unless there are site specific requirements which are necessary to make the development acceptable. CIL is charged on the relevant net additional floorspace created by the development. The charge for residential floorspace is £120m². The CIL charge is non-negotiable and is calculated at the time planning permission is granted. As the proposal does not involve any net additional increase in floorspace, the development will not attract any CIL charge in this case.

Planning obligations under section 106

With the implementation of the Council's CIL charging schedule on 1st April 2015, section 106 planning obligations can only be used to secure affordable housing provision and other site specific requirements. Tariff style financial payments can no longer be sought. Under Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010, where a decision is made which results in planning permission being granted for development, a planning obligation may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission for that development if the obligation is:

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- directly related to the development; and
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

In the case of the current planning application, the only planning obligations required to make the development acceptable are:

- i) Securing 13 of the units as affordable housing units, in accordance with Policy HS3

of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

- ii) The provision, as necessary, of fire hydrants to serve the development in accordance with Policy INF1 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31 and saved Policy H10 of the Watford District Plan 2000.
- iii) A payment of £2,000 towards the variation of the relevant traffic regulation order to exclude the development from the local controlled parking zone, to ensure future residents of the development are not entitled to resident's permits, in accordance with saved Policy T26 of the Watford District Plan 2000.

These obligations meet the tests in Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 and, consequently, can be taken into account as a material planning consideration in the determination of the application. The applicant has agreed to enter into these planning obligations and a unilateral undertaking is currently in preparation.

Consideration of objections received

Objections	Officer's response
Increased traffic in congested residential area.	The predicted levels of traffic at peak times from the proposed residential use will be no greater than that for the lawful commercial use if it were fully occupied.
Inadequate local infrastructure to serve new flats.	Thames Water has raised no objections in respect of sewerage capacity. No Section 106 contributions can be sought in this case as the Council has now introduced its CIL charging schedule. With no net additional floorspace created, there will be no CIL charge in this case.
Increased traffic congestion on Whippendell	The proposed residential use will not

Road and Rickmansworth Road.	generate any greater levels of traffic at peak times than the lawful commercial use of the building.
Inadequate parking provision on-site for new residents. Will increase on-street parking. Existing on-street parking already fully used.	The proposal provides 62 parking spaces for the proposed flats which is the maximum provision allowed under the Council's parking standards. This equates to 1.44 spaces per flat.
Loss of commercial units.	The marketing evidence submitted demonstrates a very low demand for the commercial units.
Development to rear has already increased from 107 to 147 dwellings.	This is a misunderstanding regarding the grant of planning permission ref. 14/00262/FULM. This did not grant permission for a further 40 houses but approved a revised design for the 40 houses that had already been granted. The total number of dwellings on the remainder of the site remains at 107.

Conclusion

There is no objection in principle to the conversion of the existing building into residential flats. The site is within a primarily residential area, is brownfield land, and is close to public transport and local facilities. The existing building offers low quality commercial space for which there is limited demand in this location. The building is locally listed and the proposal will secure the long term use of the building whilst retaining the building's character and appearance. The proposed conversion will provide good quality accommodation for future residents and will have no adverse impacts on surrounding properties or the local area.

The application makes provision for affordable housing but this is not fully in accordance

with Policy HS3 as only 13 affordable units are proposed rather than the policy requirement of 15. This is due principally to the configuration of the building and not for reasons of viability. Following discussions with the Council's Housing team, an increased provision of social rented units (from 3 to 6) and the predominance of 2 bed flats is considered to provide a sufficient housing gain to overcome the provision of 2 fewer units. The provision of 13 affordable housing units is therefore considered acceptable in this case.

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

The Local Planning Authority is justified in interfering with the applicant's Human Rights in order to alleviate any adverse effect on adjoining properties and their occupiers and on general public amenity. With regard to any infringement of third party Human Rights, these are not considered to be of such a nature and degree as to override the Human Rights of the applicant and therefore warrant refusal of planning permission.

RECOMMENDATION

- (A)** That planning permission be granted subject to the completion of a planning obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure the following provisions and subject to the conditions listed below:

Section 106 Heads of Terms

- i) To secure a financial payment to the Council of:
 - a) £2,000 towards the variation of the relevant Traffic Regulation Order to exclude the site from the controlled parking zone, thereby preventing residents' parking permits being allocated to this site.

- ii) To secure 13 flats as affordable housing to comprise 6 social rented housing units (2 x 1 bed and 4 x 2 bed) and 7 affordable rented housing units (1 x studio and 6 x 2 bed), in accordance with Policy HS3 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2013.
- iii) To secure the provision of fire hydrants as required by the County Council in accordance with Policy H10 of the Watford District Plan 2000.

Conditions

1. The development to which this permission relates shall be begun within a period of 3 years commencing on the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development shall only be constructed in accordance with the following approved drawings, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

A2448 001 P15, 110 P16, 111 P15, 112 P18

A2448 200 P18, 211 P18, 212 P20, 213 P17, 214 P17, 300 P15, 400 P18

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to what has been permitted.

3. Construction of the development hereby permitted shall not take place before 8am or after 6pm Mondays to Fridays, before 8am or after 1pm on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays and Public Holidays.

Reason: To safeguard the amenities and quiet enjoyment of neighbouring properties during the time that the development is being constructed, pursuant to Policy SE22 of the Watford District Plan 2000.

4. No development shall commence until the site has been registered with the Considerate Constructors Scheme and development shall be carried out in accordance with the requirements of this Scheme at all times.

Reason: To minimise the impact of construction on the local community and the environment.

5. No development shall commence until full details and samples of the materials to be used for the external surfaces of the development (including walls, roofs, windows and doors) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall only be implemented in accordance with the approved materials.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of the area and the locally listed building, in accordance with Policies UD1 and UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

6. No development shall commence until details of all vents associated with mechanical ventilation systems, boilers, etc. to be installed on the building facades have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of this locally listed building, in accordance with Policy UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

7. i) No development shall commence until details of the noise mitigation measures to be installed to control noise transmission to the flats at ground floor level (specifically Flats G-8, G-9 and G-10) above the kendo club at lower ground floor level have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The proposed mitigation measures must achieve an internal noise level

of 35 dB L_{Amax} incorporating mitigation measures as set out in the report by Hoare Lea dated 29.06.15 (Revision 01).

ii) None of the flats at ground floor level (specifically Flats G-8, G-9 and G-10) shall be occupied until written and photographic evidence has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority to confirm that the approved mitigation measures have been installed in full and in accordance with the manufacturers instructions.

Reason: To minimise any potential noise nuisance and to ensure an adequate level of amenity is provided to the occupiers of these flats.

8. i) No development shall commence until details of the plant to be installed in the plant room at lower ground floor level and the noise mitigation measures to be installed to control noise transmission to the flats at ground floor level (specifically Flats G-11 and G-12) above the plant room have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The proposed mitigation measures must achieve an internal noise level of 35 dB L_{Amax} incorporating mitigation measures as set out in the report by Hoare Lea dated 29.06.15 (Revision 01).

ii) None of the flats at ground floor level (specifically Flats G-11 and G-12) shall be occupied until written and photographic evidence has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority to confirm that the approved mitigation measures have been installed in full and in accordance with the manufacturers instructions.

Reason: To minimise any potential noise nuisance and to ensure an adequate level of amenity is provided to the occupiers of these flats.

9. No development on the ground, first or second floors shall commence until two toilets have been provided at lower ground floor level for the use of the kendo club in Unit 3, as shown on approved drawing no. A2448-212 P20.

Reason: To ensure adequate replacement toilet facilities are provided for this unit and to enable the use to continue uninterrupted.

10. No dwelling shall be occupied until the refuse and re-cycling stores for the proposed dwellings and the retained commercial units at lower ground floor level, as shown on the approved drawings, have been constructed in full. Each store shall be retained as approved at all times.

Reason: To ensure adequate facilities are provided for the occupiers of the site and in the interests of the visual appearance of the site and its impact on the street scene and character of the surrounding area, in accordance with Policies SD1 and UD1 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31

11. No dwelling shall be occupied until the cycle store sufficient for 44 cycles to serve the proposed dwellings, as shown on the approved drawings, has been constructed in full. This store shall be retained as approved at all times.

Reason: To ensure adequate facilities are provided for the occupiers of the site and in the interests of the visual appearance of the site and its impact on the street scene and character of the surrounding area, in accordance with Policy UD1 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31 and saved Policy T10 of the Watford District Plan 2000.

12. No dwelling shall be occupied until the new road junction onto King Georges Avenue and the new access road into the site and to the lower ground level parking area, as shown in principle on the approved drawing nos. 1248_PLN_502 and 503 forming part of planning permission ref. 14/00991/VAR (or any subsequent

amendment agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority), have been constructed in full and made available for use.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety and to ensure access to the parking spaces serving the development, in accordance with Policy T21 of the Watford District Plan 2000.

13. No dwelling shall be occupied until the 67 car parking spaces at lower ground level, as shown on the approved drawing nos. 1248_PLN_502 and 503 forming part of planning permission ref. 14/00991/VAR (or any subsequent amendment agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority), have been provided in full and made available for use. Of these spaces, 57 shall be allocated for the residential occupiers and their visitors and 10 shall be allocated for the commercial occupiers and their visitors, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This parking accommodation shall be permanently retained and shall not be used for any other purpose than the parking of vehicles of occupants of the development or visitors to the site.

Reason: To ensure that the development makes adequate provision for the parking of vehicles of the future occupiers of the development and their visitors in the interests of highway safety and to accord with Policy T22 of the Watford District Plan 2000.

14. No dwelling shall be occupied until the damaged frieze over the central entrance on Whippendell Road has been restored.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of this locally listed building, in accordance with Policy UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

15. No dwelling shall be occupied until details of the communal terrestrial television aerial and satellite dish have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of this locally listed building, in accordance with Policy UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

16. For the avoidance of doubt, no communications development permitted by Class B or Class C of Part 16 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 shall be undertaken on the building.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of this locally listed building, in accordance with Policy UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

17. No CCTV or external lighting shall be installed on the building until details have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The CCTV and lighting shall only be installed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of this locally listed building, in accordance with Policy UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

Informatives

1. This planning permission is accompanied by a unilateral undertaking under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure a contribution towards the variation of the Borough of Watford (Watford Central Area and West Watford Area) (Controlled Parking Zones) (Consolidation) Order 2006 to exclude future residents of the development from entitlement to residents parking permits. The

agreement also requires the provision of necessary fire hydrants to serve the development and the provision of 13 affordable housing units.

2. In dealing with this application, Watford Borough Council has considered the proposal in a positive and proactive manner having regard to the policies of the development plan as well as paragraphs 186 and 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework and other material considerations, and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010, as amended.

Drawing numbers

A2448 001 P15, 110 P16, 111 P15, 112 P18

A2448 200 P18, 211 P18, 212 P20, 213 P17, 214 P17, 300 P15, 400 P18

(B) In the event that no Section 106 planning obligation is completed by 24th July 2015 in respect of the Heads of Terms set out above, the Head of Regeneration and Development be authorised to refuse planning permission for this application for the following reasons:

1. The proposal fails to make provision for affordable housing and as such is contrary to Policy HS3 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.
2. The proposal fails to make appropriate provision to restrict on-street parking in the surrounding Controlled Parking Zone and as such is contrary to saved Policy T24 of the Watford District Plan 2000.
3. The proposal fails to make provision for fire hydrants to serve the development and as such is contrary to Policy INF1 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31 and saved Policy H10 of the Watford District Plan 2000.

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