

Planning Application for Retaining the Three Upper One-Bedroom Flats

20 Harmer Street,

Gravesend,

DA12 2AX

Planning, Design, Access, and Heritage Statement

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Dream Design Develop Ltd

01474 648009

info@dreamdesigndevelop.co.uk

www.dreamdesigndevelop.co.uk

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1. Introduction

This statement has been prepared to support a **full planning application** for **retaining the first, second, and third floors** of 20 Harmer Street, Gravesend, as **three self-contained one-bedroom flats**.

The purpose of this application is to regularise the established residential use of these upper floors, which have been continuously occupied in this arrangement **for over 10 years** without any material change to their layout, structure, or external appearance.

The building lies within the **Harmer Street Conservation Area** and is of historic architectural merit. This statement addresses the heritage sensitivities associated with the site and confirms that the retention of the existing residential use will have **no harmful impact** on the significance of the building or the surrounding streetscape.

The document covers:

- Historical background and planning history of the building.
- Detailed description of the existing accommodation and access arrangements.
- An assessment of the proposal against local and national planning policies.
- A heritage assessment in the context of the conservation area.
- Consideration of residential amenity, transport, and sustainability.

2. Site and Surrounding Area

Location and Context

20 Harmer Street is located in Gravesend town centre, an area characterised by a mixture of commercial, residential, and leisure uses. The property sits on the eastern side of Harmer Street, forming part of a uniform Victorian terrace that retains much of its original character.

Urban Setting

The surrounding streets contain a vibrant mix of uses, including ground-floor retail with residential accommodation above, dedicated apartment blocks, restaurants, and cultural venues. This blend of uses supports the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Transport Accessibility

The site is in a highly sustainable location:

- **Rail** – Gravesend station is a short walk away, providing frequent services to London, Ebbsfleet International, and the Medway Towns.
- **Bus** – Multiple bus routes serve King Street and nearby transport hubs, providing good connectivity to surrounding areas.

- **Road** – Harmer Street links directly to the A226 and is close to the A2/M2 network.
- **Cycling/Walking** – The flat topography of Gravesend and the presence of pedestrian-friendly streets encourage active travel.

Conservation Area Setting

The Harmer Street Conservation Area is designated for its architectural uniformity, historical significance, and contribution to Gravesend's urban heritage. Buildings here generally exhibit:

- Brick façades in Flemish bond.
- Sash windows with stone lintels and sills.
- Consistent parapet rooflines.

20 Harmer Street makes a positive contribution to this streetscape, and the existing use supports the active occupation and ongoing upkeep of the property.

3. Property History

Mid-19th Century – Constructed as a Victorian townhouse, forming part of a terrace designed in a uniform and harmonious style.

1920s–1930s – Subdivided internally for multiple occupation in response to changing housing needs and increased local population.

1993 – Installation of a new shopfront (planning permission granted, Ref. No: 19930457) and subsequent approval of joinery details and paint scheme (Ref. No: 19940491), ensuring sympathetic treatment of the building's frontage in accordance with conservation principles.

2007 – Planning permission and Listed Building Consent granted for the conversion of the ground floor and basement into a two-bedroom maisonette, installation of a new ground floor front façade, and external staircase on the south side elevation (Refs. No: 20071101 & 20071102). These works were designed to improve both the residential use and the visual appearance of the building.

2008 – Basement and ground floor changed to residential use as per approval in 2007 (two-bedroom maisonette – not part of this application).

2010–Present – Upper floors continuously occupied as three one-bedroom flats for over 10 years, with no physical alterations. The units have been maintained to a high standard, retaining historic architectural features internally and externally.

4. Existing Accommodation and Current Usage

The three self-contained one-bedroom flats occupy the first, second, and third floors of the building. Each flat contains:

- A separate living/dining area.
- A kitchen fitted with modern facilities.
- A bathroom/WC.
- A double bedroom.

The internal arrangements are efficient and functional, and the original proportions of the rooms have been largely maintained.

Current Occupancy

The flats are occupied by a stable mix of professional tenants and retired residents, contributing to the diversity and vibrancy of the local community. The absence of transient or short-term letting supports long-term community stability.

Condition

The flats are well maintained, compliant with relevant housing standards, and in good decorative order. No works requiring planning permission have been undertaken during the current period of occupation.

5. Design and Access Statement

5.1 Design Considerations

- **External Appearance** – The building retains its original Victorian brick façade, stone window surrounds, and traditional sash windows.
- **Internal Layout** – Functional arrangements ensure good daylight penetration, ventilation, and comfortable living conditions.
- **Materials** – All visible elements, such as brickwork and joinery, are preserved and maintained using appropriate methods and materials in keeping with the conservation area.

5.2 Access

- **Pedestrian Access** – The main entrance is directly from Harmer Street into a communal hallway and staircase serving the upper floors.
- **Transport Access** – Excellent public transport links make this an ideal location for residents without private vehicles.
- **Parking** – No on-site provision; however, nearby public parking facilities and the sustainable location mitigate the need for on-site parking.
- **Disabled Access** – The historic layout with narrow staircases prevents full compliance with modern accessibility standards, but this is typical for properties of this age and type.

6. Heritage Statement

6.1 Significance of the Property

20 Harmer Street is a positive contributor to the Harmer Street Conservation Area, displaying key elements of mid-Victorian architecture. Its value lies not only in individual features but also in the way it forms part of a coherent terrace.

6.2 Conservation Area Context

The retention of the three upper flats does not involve any external alteration or intensification that would impact the special interest of the conservation area. The continued residential use supports the ongoing maintenance and occupation of the building.

6.3 Impact of the Proposal

- No change to external elevations.
- No loss of historic fabric.
- Maintains the established use and occupancy pattern.
- Neutral impact on heritage significance.

7. Planning Policy Context and Considerations

The proposal aligns with:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023)

- Paragraph 11 – Supports the effective use of land in meeting housing needs.
- Paragraph 69 – Encourages provision of smaller housing units to meet a range of community needs.
- Paragraph 130 – Requires developments to maintain a high standard of design and reflect local character.
- Paragraph 197 – Recognises the importance of sustaining and enhancing heritage assets.

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- **CS02** – Supports sustainable development in urban areas using existing buildings.
- **CS14** – Encourages a balanced housing mix, including smaller units suitable for single people and couples.
- **CS20** – Protects and enhances the borough's heritage assets.

8. Assessment of Key Issues

Housing Supply and Need

The three one-bedroom flats contribute to meeting the borough's demand for smaller, more affordable housing in a sustainable location, directly supporting the objectives of CS14 and the NPPF.

Residential Amenity

The units offer good-quality living environments with appropriate room sizes, natural light, and ventilation. There is no adverse impact on neighbouring properties through overlooking or loss of light.

Sustainability and Transport

The site's central location reduces car dependency and encourages walking, cycling, and public transport use, consistent with sustainable development principles in the NPPF and Core Strategy.

Heritage Impact

The retention of the flats causes no harm to the heritage asset or conservation area, complying with CS20 and NPPF heritage policies.

Highways and Parking

No additional parking demand is generated beyond the established use. The location is well served by alternative transport options.

9. Conclusion

This application seeks planning permission to **retain the three upper one-bedroom flats** at 20 Harmer Street, securing their lawful status and ensuring the continuation of a beneficial residential use.

The proposal:

- Preserves the historic and architectural significance of the building.
- Contributes to the borough's housing supply in a sustainable location.
- Aligns fully with both local and national planning policy.
- Has no adverse effects on amenity, highways, or the conservation area.

Given these considerations, the proposal should be supported and **planning permission granted**.