

DELEGATED PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Abbey

Address: 21-23 Queen Victoria Street, Reading, RG1 1TE

Proposals: A) 230942/ADV Replacement of existing shop front sign

B) 231205 / LBC Replacement of existing shop front sign

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes

Date received (valid from): 22 August 2023

Extended Target Decision date: 24 October 2023

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application relates to the ground floor of a mid-terrace shop unit on the west side of Queen Victoria Street. The unit constitutes two previously amalgamated units, occupied by a vintage shop called Flamingo's vintage and is part of a Grade II Listed terrace of buildings along Queen Victoria Street, in close proximity to the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. The site is located within the Reading Central Area Policy CR1-10, the Primary Shopping Area and is an 'Active Frontage' as defined by Policy CR7.

The listing for 21-23 Queen Oxford street states:

QUEEN VICTORIA STREET 1. 5128 Nos 1 to 31 (odd) Nos 2 to 32 (even) SU 7173 NE 1/558 SU 7173 SW 2/558 SU 7173 SE 3/558 SU 7173 12/558 II

"Including Nos 148 and 149 Friar Street and Nos 24 to 28 and 35 to 37 (consec) Broad Street. A circa 1894 commercial street with returns to Broad and Friar Streets. Probably by Joseph Morris. Dutch gabled free Baroque style. 3 1/2 storeys, yellow brick and terracotta with dividing Ionic pilasters. Dentil cornice. Pilasters to dormers, broken pediments above. An elongated pattern of shallow bays to 1st and 2nd floors 4:2:1:1:1:1:3. Mullion and transom window to bays, sashes with architraves (and pediments on 1st floor) to rest. Modern shopfronts, retaining cornice to fascia and scroll brackets to pilasters, only one shop retains prewar shopfront. Large returns to Broad Street. The return to east (No 28 Broad Street) supported by No 26 (dated 1894, grey brick with red terracotta dressings) and by No 24 (an early C20 Bank with -large shaped pediment doorway on corner to Cross Street; red brick with stone dressings and stone fret patterns to gables)."

A sign has been installed that has the same design as the proposed plans but is not timber as specified in the application documents and does not have any of the detailing as shown on the plans.

Site visit date: 20/09/2023



2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposal seeks advertising consent and listed building consent for the replacement of the existing timber fascia board with a non illuminated timber fascia. The replacement fascia board proposed plans which stretch almost the whole width of the shop frontage show new surround beading. Signage was proposed to be fixed to the existing sign to minimise any harm to the listed building. The sign proposed consisted of a painted timber fascia with the Flamingo's Vintage logo. Traditional timber and oils based paint materials are proposed to be in keeping with the listed building.

No other changes were proposed to the shop frontage.

Signage has already been installed at the site, which does not match that proposed.

Plans considered

23049/001 Rev PL1 Existing and proposed Elevations, Location and Block plan, sign details

Heritage statement

As received 21 August 2023 for application 230942/ADV and on 22 August 2023 for application 231205/LBC

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

170527/ADV New externally illuminated letters and projecting sign. New panels to existing internal suspended roundel. Permitted 14/06/2017

170613/LBC New externally illuminated signage, shopfront to be painted Permitted 14/06/2017

06-01454-FUL - Retrospective change of use from A1 to mixed A1 and A3 with ancillary outdoor seating. Permitted 23/01/2007

06-00856-LBC – Alterations to shop front. Permitted 08/09/2006

06-00853-ADV - 1x fascia sign and 1x projecting sign, both externally illuminated. Permitted 13/09/2006

4. CONSULTATIONS

Site notices were displayed and a press notice published.

One response in objection to application 231205 was received due to the size, materials and colours of the sign that is not in keeping with the style of the building or the street. No other responses were received.

RBC Conservation officer

The Conservation officer has objected to application 231205 and the proposed replacement signage due to the proposed colours, corporate branding, size and scale of the fascia which will be out of keeping with the listed building and area in which it is located. Insufficient detail was provided in the Heritage statement submitted. The report provided is attached as Appendix 1.

Communication with agent

It was confirmed that the application would be recommended for refusal. The agent has not requested that the application be withdrawn and it instead will be determined on its merits, to allow the opportunity to appeal.

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Development Framework (LDF) (Core Strategy, Sites and Detailed Policies Document and Reading Central Area Action Plan) according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building, its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 requires the Local Planning Authority to exercise its powers under these regulations in the interests of amenity and public safety taking into account the provisions of the development plan, so far as they are material; and any other relevant factors. Regulation 3 states that factors relevant to amenity include the general characteristics of the locality, including the presence of any feature of historic, architectural, cultural, or similar interest.

Factors relevant to public safety include highway safety and whether the advert would hinder security or surveillance devices, including speed cameras.

Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework Chapter 16, Paragraph 203 and 205 and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

CC7: Design and the Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding amenity

EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

OU4: Advertisements

OU5: Shopfronts and Cash Machines

SPD

Design Guide for Shopfronts January 2022

Other

Historic England Advice Note 2 – Making changes to Heritage Assets illustrates the application of policies set out in the NPPF in determining applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent.

English Heritage's "Conservation Principles" provides policy and guidance for the "sustainable management of the historic environment".

APPRAISAL

Design and Impact on the Historic Character of the Building and Visual Amenity of the Area

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires 'special regard' to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting.

Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority [or the Secretary of State] shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Local Plan Policy EN1 states that 'Historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings will be protected and where possible enhanced. This will include: Listed Buildings.' and that 'All proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance.'

Policy OU4 states that advertisements will respect the building or structure on which they are located and/or their surroundings and setting in terms of size, location, design, materials. It also states that, 'Advertisements will not obstruct windows, any other sign already located on the building, or cut across significant architectural features such as historic fascias, windows, pilasters, cornices or scrolls'

The proposal seeks to replace existing signage with a non-illuminated timber painted replacement. No internal changes are proposed. No changes to the shop frontage are proposed following changes granted in 2017.

The previous amalgamation of two units at the site introduced a fascia which crosses over two shop units has resulted in the loss of architectural detail along the shopfronts, contrary to policy OU4. Replacement signage should not result in any additional harm at the site to the listed building or the character of the setting in which the building is located.

The fascia sign proposed is flat with beading and does not project forwards substantially from the front elevation. However the size and scale of the sign is out of keeping with the character of the area. The fascia is too large and is considered harmful due to its dominance on the front elevation, drawing focus away from the listed building. The conservation officer has objected to the use of bright colours, lettering and branding which they consider out of keeping with the architectural features of the listed building and results in would result in less than substantial harm to the special interest of the listed building and its setting.

The proposed development would cause less than substantial harm to this heritage asset and the setting of this heritage asset. The scale of the signage is too large, and this, combined with the design, results in an inappropriate addition to the Listed Building and wider street scene. The proposal is therefore considered to harm the listed building and its setting as it does not respect the key features of the historic building and other listed buildings in its vicinity. It would be out of keeping with the historic character of Queen Victoria Street, and would fail to meet the requirements of the Reading Local Plan 2019 and Design Guide to shopfronts SPD (Policies CC7, OU4, OU5 & EN1). There are no public benefits arising from the proposal which outweigh this less than substantial harm and as such the proposal must be refused in accordance with paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other issues

The advertisement would not result in a detrimental impact on highway safety, no illumination is proposed.

The proposed work to attach the fascia to the previous framework on the building, should not harm the fabric of the building but care should be taken that no damage is caused to the original shop frontage.

The design with beaded detailing could add to the vibrancy of the town centre and provide visual interest to the front of the listed building if the proposed scale of a solid timber fascia was substantially reduced.

A fascia sign has been displayed at the site during the consideration of the planning applications. The sign that has been erected is constructed from modern materials and is not constructed of solid timber or have any detailing and does not have planning permission.

Conclusion

The development has been assessed and the works are not considered to be in accordance with the above relevant policies or relevant section of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and planning permission and Advertisement Consent and Listed Building consent cannot be granted, for the following reason:

The proposal, by virtue of its size, inappropriate materials and position obscuring corbels and pilasters as well as other important detailing results in an overly prominent and visually dominant addition to the Listed Building which fails to respect the existing streetscene and would cause harm to the listed building. As a consequence the development fails to protect or enhance the Listed Building, and would have an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance London Road, contrary to Policies EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), OU4 (Advertisements) and OU5 (Shopfronts and Cash Machines) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019), the Design Guide for Shopfronts (2022) and National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) Chapter 16, Paragraphs 200-214.

RECOMMENDATION:

REFUSE listed building and advertisement consent.

Informatives:

Refused plans

No pre-app advice

Enforcement issue

P&P

Appendix 1 Conservation officer comments on application 231205

Summary

Objection - The proposed signage, by reason of its size, design, colour and lettering, would result in less than substantial harm to the special interest of the listed building and its setting. There is no public interest. Therefore, the works would be contrary to the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policies EN1, OU4 and OU5 of the Reading Local Plan.

Relevant policies and legislation

From the point of view of the historic environment, the main statutory tests are set out within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16(2) and 66 require that **special regard** be given to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

National Planning Policy and Guidance

The NPPF outlines government policy, including its policy in respect of the historic environment. Chapter 16 of the NPPF 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development.

Paragraph 197 requires local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraph 199 of the NPPF requires that *'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the **significance** of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation....'* And paragraph 200 says, *'any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration...) should require **clear and convincing justification**'*. Paragraph 202 says that *'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighted against the **public benefits** of the proposal...'*

National Planning Practice Guidance on Historic Environment provides context to the NPPF.

Local Planning Policy and Guidance

Policy EN1 'Protection and enhancement of the historic environment' of the Reading Borough Local Plan sets out the Council's aspirations for the historic environment. The policy requires that all proposals to protect and, where possible, enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. It echoes the NPPF by stating, **"Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits"**.

Applications which affect **Listed Buildings** are expected not to have an adverse impact on the elements that contribute to their special architectural or historic interest, including their settings.

Policy OU4 'Advertisements' requires proposed advertisements to respect the building on which they are located and/or their surroundings and setting in terms of size, location, design, materials, colour, noise, lettering, amount and type of text, illumination and luminance. The proposed advertisements in a historic environment should be in accordance with the following criteria:

"a) Advertisements will not obstruct windows, any other sign already located on the building, or cut across significant architectural features such as historic fascias, windows, pilasters, cornices or scrolls;

b) Where a shop or business occupies more than one adjacent unit, the advertisement will not run between the shopfronts;

c) Advertisements on listed buildings or in Conservation Areas will respect or enhance the building or area, and will respect the key features of the special historic interest;"

Policy OU5 'Shopfronts and Cash Machines' reiterates the criteria above for the new shopfronts by advising:

"a) New shopfronts on listed buildings or in Conservation Areas will respect or enhance the building or area, and will respect the key features of the special historic interest;

b) Where a shop occupies multiple units, shopfronts will not run in a continuous horizontal line across the different unit façades. The fascia and the shop windows should be broken up to ensure the features of each unit are not lost;"

Other Guidance

Historic England Advice Note 2 – Making changes to Heritage Assets illustrates the application of policies set out in the NPPF in determining applications for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent.

English Heritage's "Conservation Principles" provides policy and guidance for the "sustainable management of the historic environment".

Relevant heritage assets

The application site, 21-23 Queen Victoria Street, forms part of Grade II Listed Buildings, 1-31 Queen Victoria Street. The site is not within a conservation area; however, it is in close vicinity of/relationship with the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area to the east and the St Mary's Butts/castle Street Conservation Area to the south.

In addition, it faces a number of listed buildings at 2-32 Queen Victoria Street.

Significance of heritage assets

The NPPF defines significance as the *"value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest."*

The interest may be architectural or historic, as set out in the Town and Country Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Section 1.

"Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting." (NPPF, 2023)

Historic England assesses significance in a similar manner, referring to evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values of a place.

As illustrated below, in addition to the Grade II listed building's historic and architectural interests of their own, their location and position within Reading, prime retail streets retaining historic frontages, have strong visual containment within the historic centre of the town.

Both 1-31 and 2-32 Queen Victoria Street represent the re-organisation of the historic fabric by creating a solid and attractive street in response to the arrival of the railway.



The application site (circled in red), listed buildings (purple stars), locally listed buildings (pink stars) and conservation areas (light purple)

The special historic and architectural interests of the Grade II listed building is officially described as following:

QUEEN VICTORIA STREET 1. 5128 Nos 1 to 31 (odd) Nos 2 to 32 (even) SU 7173 NE 1/558 SU 7173 SW 2/558 SU 7173 SE 3/558 SU 7173 12/558 II

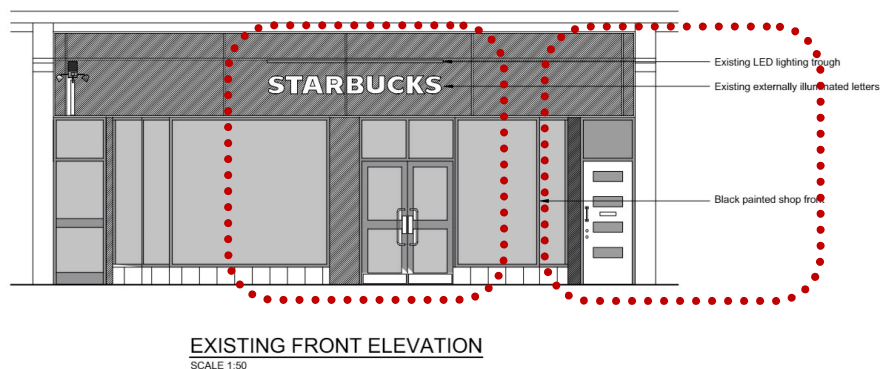
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Impact of proposal upon heritage asset(s)

The existing shopfront constitutes two units that were amalgamated, and therefore, a fascia sign was introduced running on two shopfronts, causing the loss of traditional elements of corbel, capital, and possibly transoms. As such, the modern shopfront already fails to meet criteria (a), (b) and (c) of Policy OU4 and Policy EN1 of the local plan.



View of Queen Victoria Street showing original shopfronts



Existing Front Elevation – original units (red dashed) and some of the elements are lost

The proposed signage would be made of timber with the colours of yellow and pink (which are the brand colours?) and design of two large figures and relatively modern and large lettering that would be visually dominant and intrusive, detracting from the historic and architectural features of the listed building.



PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION

SCALE 1:50

Proposed Front Elevation

Whilst the previous/existing shopfront has the same size of fascia sign, due to its colour and simple design with less lettering, its impact on the listed building and the setting of listed buildings are minimal compared to the proposal. It should be noted that restrained, dark colours often work well with the historic facades of the shops, and corporate colour and branding make little or no reference to local distinctiveness. As such, the proposed signage would not preserve the special architectural and historic fabric of the listed building and would be inappropriate and unacceptable.

Furthermore, the submitted heritage statement is insufficient as it does not refer to the listing of the building at all and makes any reasonable comments. The subject building is not a Grade II* listed building, as suggested by the application form.

Conservation response

- ☐ No objections
- ☐ No objections subject to conditions (as noted below)
- ☐ Clarification required
- ☒ Object

The proposed signage, by reason of its size, design, colour and lettering, would result in less than substantial harm to the special interest of the listed building and its setting. The works would be contrary to the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policies EN1, OU4 and OU5 of the Reading Local Plan.