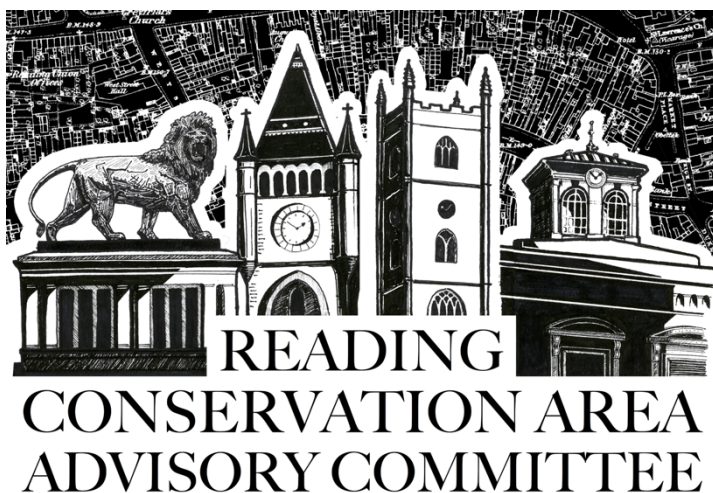




Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee
7 June 2023

Dear Ryan Allen

**COMMENTS ON PLANNING APPLICATION & LISTED BUILDING CONSENT 230640 & 230641 &
ADVERTISING CONSENT 230602 33 LONDON STREET**

On balance we supported applications 221141 & 221142 but we objected to the glazing of the upper part of the front door and had concerns about the lack of detail provided in relation to materials for changes to a listed building in the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. Some elements of these two applications were removed in the revised plans which were granted. We did not comment on application 221498 as we overlooked it.

We note that as at the date of writing some of the approved works have been carried out.



33 London Street 23 May 2023

The following works are now proposed in the Design & Access Statement (230640 & 230641)

- Removal of existing brass plates to the entrance column bases.
- New slim line black retractable awning installed over the entrance door.
- Brass nosing to existing stone steps to prevent further damage to the front nosings and improve access for the visually impaired through greater contrast.
- Installation of 2no black and bronze handrails to either side of the stair to provide improved access for the ambulant disabled.
- Reinstatement of a flag pole to the LHS pilaster to aid the building identification for people walking from Reading centre.
- New signage and lighting over the windows.
- 4no. lights within the lightwell to highlight the pilasters.

The following works are proposed as part of the advertising consent 230602.

- New logo on two signage boards above the windows
- Black awning with logo over the front door
- New flagpole (old flagpole removed)

Summary of Comments

- Removal of brass plates is acceptable subject to details of how this will be achieved and making good of any damage caused by their removal
- The awning was refused on the previous applications and we see no reason why it should be approved this time.
- Brass nosings seem superfluous
- Handrails are acceptable subject to materials and design details
- We object to the reinstatement of the flagpole and no details are given of the advertising it would carry.
- Insufficient details are given about the signage (apart from the design) to understand the impact it would have on the listed building.
- Insufficient details are given about the lighting to understand the impact it would have on the listed building

1. HERITAGE

1.1 33 London Street is the first heritage building on the south east side of the IDR. Together with the former Central Club and Black History Mural on the west side it forms the gateway to Katesgrove ward and south to Whitley. The Great Expectations at 33 London Street has one of the grandest facades of any of Reading's buildings. It dates from 1843 when it opened as Reading's new Public Rooms to a great fanfare. It is Grade II listed, (1113515) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1113515?section=official-list-entry>).

1.2 Local celebrity Mary Mitford ceremonially laid the cornerstone of the public rooms on London Street on 31 August 1842. The Berkshire Chronicle reported “..from the rather unusual circumstances that a lady (Miss Mitford the well known authoress) had consented to officiate, much interest was taken in the affair.¹”

1.3 The opening of the new public rooms and the Literary, Scientific and Mechanic's Institute was a significant civic and cultural event and the Reading Mercury report covered six and a half columns of tiny typescript in its 28 October 1843 edition. The hall of the Institute was laid out with four rows of benches

¹ Berkshire Chronicle, 3 September 1842 p3.

for a formal dinner followed by speeches, multiple toasts and musical interludes. Charles Dickens had been invited and although unable to attend had written wishing the building every success "...with much pleasure in knowing that my friend Mr Serjeant Talfourd [*Thomas Talfourd*] will be present at its christening, as the representative of literature, and the champion of its rights." ²

1.4 In 1866 it was acquired for use as a Primitive Methodist Chapel and by 1869 internal changes had been carried out to make it more suitable for this use³. The frieze inscribed 'Primitive Methodist Chapel 1866', that is mentioned in the Historic England listing description is no longer visible. Photographs from 1982 show the inscription. It is possible that the frieze was refaced to cover the lettering. In the twentieth century uses include: requisitioned by the Ministry of Works in the Second World War; it opened as the Everyman Theatre in 1952; purchased by Reading Borough Council in 1957 for use by the theatre; occupied by the Reading Standard in 1960 and used as a training centre for Digital in 1970⁴. Later it became the Great Expectations which, was for a couple of years from May 2015 onwards, home to the Dickens Brewery.

1.5 The building appears in early photographs attributed to William Fox Talbot or his assistant Nicolaas Henneman (1840s). It was next door to Lovejoy's Library where the photographs were for sale. Because of its landmark position it has been well documented throughout its life in photographs and drawings. Images in the Historic England Archive show the interior and exterior of the building in 1982⁵. These show the front door as it is today but with letter boxes at the bottom of the door which have now been covered up and a new letter box inserted on the right hand side of the left door (reference 0227_178).

2. PROPOSED CHANGES

2.1 The brass plates 'Great Expectations' on the front of the building are now redundant but details should be provided of how they are to be removed and how damage will be rectified. The application is silent on the two brass cases for advertising which we assume will remain.

The façade of 33 London Street bears the scars of the removal of other fixings which have not yet been made good (see images below).

² For more information see Reading CAAC blog for Reading Museum and the High Street Heritage Action Zone Project. <https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/blog/time-travel-london-street-part-one> & <https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/blog/time-travel-on-london-street-part-two>

³ Berkshire Chronicle 24 April 1869

⁴ Reading Post 2 September 1970

⁵ Historic England – England's Places online collection – Reading places L-N (scroll down for London Street) [https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/gallery/420?place=Reading%2c+Reading%2c+Unitary+Authority+\(DistrictUAMet\)&terms=Reading&searchtype=englandsplaces&i=4&wm=1&bc=17%7C27%7C36%7C37](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/gallery/420?place=Reading%2c+Reading%2c+Unitary+Authority+(DistrictUAMet)&terms=Reading&searchtype=englandsplaces&i=4&wm=1&bc=17%7C27%7C36%7C37)



There are also currently in place two ‘temporary’ banners which may have damaged the fabric of the stonework and/or woodwork (see image on page 1 above and above).

The existing damage to the stonework should be made good with materials that are suitable for this listed building.

2.2 We do not see the need for an awning which was removed from the previous application and objected to by Reading’s Conservation and Urban Design Officer. We disagree with the applicants’ statement in the Design & Access Statement that ‘The heritage harm potential from the alternative of an open lobby is an unacceptable risk to the Listed Building and economically unreasonable’.

2.3 We do not see the need for brass nosings and fixing them to the steps is likely to damage the fabric. If repairs are required to the steps to fix damage these should be carried out in a suitable way for a heritage building.

2.4 Handrails are acceptable and a useful addition to improve accessibility to the building subject to suitable materials and detailed designs.

2.5 The poles for banners on the façade have been removed and we object to the reinstatement of a flagpole. The location is difficult to access and resulted in a tatty banner hanging there for several years which was detrimental to the character and appearance of the Market Place/ London Street Conservation Area and the listed building. The advertising consent omits any details of what the flagpole will carry.

2.6 It is unclear if the signboards over the windows are to be replaced or if the proposal is to repaint the existing boards with a new logo. We do not object to the logo but would like clarity on whether the signboards are new or not. If they are new the materials and fixings to be used should be secured by condition.

2.7 We cannot express an opinion on the proposed lighting as there are insufficient details in the application as to precise siting, type of lights and how they are to be fixed.

3. OTHER MATTERS

3.1 Although this application only deals with the exterior of the building, and the Design & Access Statement says that 'The proposals relate to the front exterior of the building only. There is no impact upon the interior', we note that the pub but not the hotel had been closed since June 2022 for refurbishment but has now re-opened. If a planning application or listed building consent has not yet been submitted for these works to the interior one should be sought.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Reading CAAC object to the proposed awning, re-instatement of the flagpole and brass nosings on the steps.

4.2 We are very concerned about the lack of details about the lighting proposal and materials for and design of the handrails. This application should not be approved until there is more clarity about these elements.

Yours Sincerely

Evelyn Williams
Chair Reading CAAC
On behalf of Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee
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