139 OXFORD ROAD
HERITAGE & PLANNING STATEMENT
NOVEMBER 2022

PURCELL

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READING HSHAZ - 139 OXFORD ROAD: HERITAGE & PLANNING STATEMENT

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PART 1 - BACKGROUND & BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE HERITAGE ACTION ZONE INITIATIVE?

Historic England is delivering the £95 million government-funded High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme. This aims to unlock the potential of high streets across England, fuelling economic, social and cultural recovery and breathe new life into it for future generations. Reading is one of 60 high streets to be offered funding as part of a four-year programme.

The High Street Heritage Action Zone in Reading extends across three conservation areas. However, as funding is limited this will be focused on the areas in need of the most investment. This includes Oxford Road and the junction of St. Mary's Butts and Castle Street.

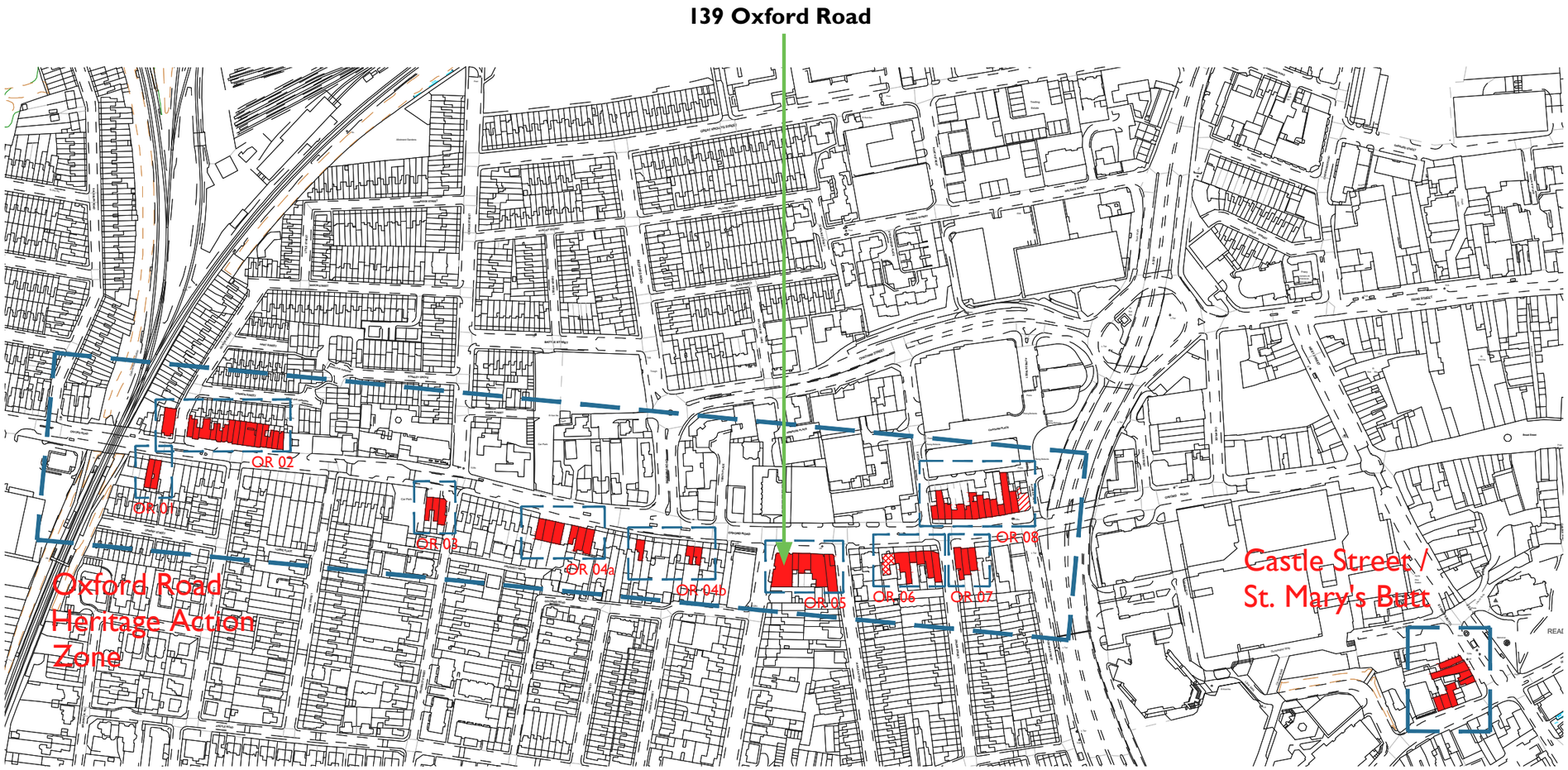
READING HSHAZ OBJECTIVES

- To enhance the understanding of Reading's heritage by revealing it's hidden histories and to give the community a sense of pride and ownership in developing the town's future

- To improve the physical condition and viability of the high streets within the three conservation areas by identifying those properties most at risk and engaging with property owners to help them to restore the buildings, to show them how to maintain the buildings and to share best practice. We want to see premises viably and fully occupied and footfall and customer satisfaction increasing.

- To develop a comprehensive strategy to improve the public realm across the HSHAZ. The outcome will be a better experience and sense of place for those living or working in or visiting the town centre.

- To support local businesses, the economy and local community and cultural initiatives by creating a positive sense of place through contributing to the heritage of their high street.



Masterplan showing situation of 84 Oxford Road within the Reading Heritage Action Zones.

1.1 SITE HISTORY

Oxford Road is one of the earliest routes leading out of Reading's medieval town centre to Pangbourne and Oxford to the west. Until the early 19th Century, the road passed through an open rural landscape with minimal development.

GEORGIAN DEVELOPMENT

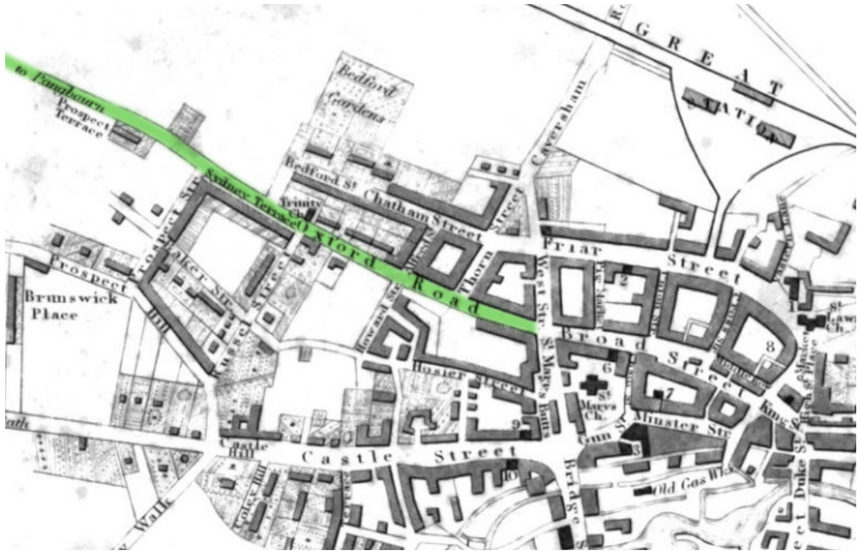
Several properties along the eastern stretch of Oxford Road were built prior to 1840 in the Georgian or Regency period. The terraces are recognisable for their restrained elevations, sash windows and round-arched entrances with fanlights. The detached villas are grand in scale and character, for example, the porticoed wing of Mannson House, which formerly comprised a large central block and two smaller side wings.

VICTORIAN GROWTH AND EXPANSION

The mid-to-late-Victorian terraces that infilled open land between the scattered Georgian developments range in scale and level of detailing, reflecting the demands of both the new industrial workers but also an emerging professional class. Unlike the Georgian residential development, these terraces comprised retail units at ground floor with residential above, introducing a greater degree of self-sufficiency to Oxford Road.

139 OXFORD ROAD

Shop 141 has recently been refurbished sensitvely and the proposals for 139 is a good example of where the original features of the shop appear to be intact but are hidden behind modern signage. Realitvely minor adjustments including replacing the entrance door, removing the modern signage and restoring the original fascia would have an instant positive impact, especially as 139 and 141 are a pair of shops with their hisotric features intact. They are listed.



Map of Reading, drawn and engraved by Edward Weller, printed by John Snare, 1840. The map shows the development of Georgian terraces and detached dwellings at intervals along the road. Oxford Road is highlighted.

An early / mid-19th century Georgian terrace at Nos. 187-193.

Late Victorian terraced development next to the railway bridge.

View of the end of Oxford Road (north side) showing shops including F. J. Cotton, dry cleaner (No. 84); Album Brothers, tailors (No. 82); K.C. Burdett, ice cream shop (No. 78) and Reading Motor Accessories (No. 76), 1965 (Reading Library), 1965 (Reading Library: (READ)192475(Sirsi) 1222017)

1.1 SHOPFRONT DESIGN PRINCIPLES & OBJECTIVES

Oxford Road has undergone much alteration since the early 20th century, however, there are a number of architectural features that remain which bring character to the street and reflect its historic function and character as a retail and residential street. These features should be retained where remaining and repaired where deteriorating.

The component shopfront parts survived in many instances along the street. Corbels are the most common remaining fragment, although pilasters survived in places and some cornices above. Some shopfronts retain appropriately proportioned fascia signage, but generally these have been replaced by inappropriate modern versions featuring oversized fascia signs and internally lit signage boxes. Glazed panels divided by mullions have generally been replaced by full-height modern glazing, which lacks depth and articulation.

What survives of the historic shopfront features are generally in poor condition across Oxford Road and should be retained, repaired and incorporated into new schemes rather than being replaced.

Ornament to upper storeys varies across the street. Georgian terraces are generally restrained, featuring sash windows, arched doorways and fanlights. The later Victorian terraces, however, exhibit a greater range of architectural features, which add character to groups of building and enliven the skyline.

Diagram showing typical features of a single shop front.

Largely intact historic shopfront at no. 111, with Early-Victorian sash windows

Historical image showing grocery store at no. 184. C. 1910

PART II - DESIGN

GROUP 8 ELEVATIONAL STUDY

Photograph of Grounp 127-137 Oxford Rd
No. 139 has been highlighted

Mock-up proposal for Group 5 (as per feasability study)
No. 139 has been highlighted

Mock-up proposal for Group 5 (Updated with Historic England comments)
No. 139 has been highlighted

2.1 EXISTING ELEVATIONAL STUDY

2.3 PROPOSED ELEVATION

2.4 PROPOSED SIGNAGE

Sign Side Elevation

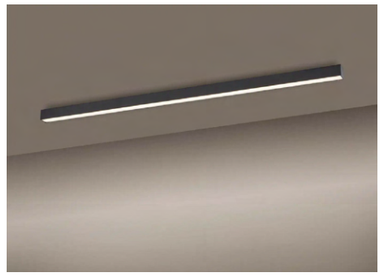
Sign Front Elevation

Timber fascia to be fabricated by specialist contractor. All logos and lettering to be hand-painted. Shop front to be painted in RAL 5014 as shown. Main lettering to be painted in RAL 1003

139 Front Elevation (lighting)

Sign Front Elevation (lighting)

Concealed slim cowl light installed in the top of the sign molding. Signage to be externally illuminated at night as illustrated. Illumination to be static. Lighting specification: Neutral (4000k), 1440 lumens per metre.



Slim cowl light example (to be concealed in top of fascia)

PART III - HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

HERITAGE CONTEXT

No. 139 Oxford Road is a Grade II listed building within the Russell Street/Castle Hill/Oxford Road Conservation Area. It is a three-storey, painted brick building with a projecting shopfront on the ground floor and residential accommodation above.

Listed buildings and conservation areas are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. National and local planning policies recognise that changes to other buildings or sites within the vicinity of a heritage asset can affect the special interest of that asset. This includes any external work that has the potential to affect the character of the conservation area.

STATEMENT OF NEED

Reading is a deprived area and is the third most unequal city in the country. Oxford Road represents one of the town's earliest streets, extending from the medieval town centre. The historic buildings on Oxford Road have suffered decline as big retail centres such as the Oracle shopping centre have taken over and dominated, with small local business finding it difficult to compete.

No. 139 is one of four sites on the street to retain its original shopfront largely intact. Modern interventions such as the installation of PVC windows and rainwater goods, oversized fascia signage, inappropriate colour schemes and the boarding up of fanlights detract from the significance of the property. The proposals enabled by High Street Heritage Action Zone funding will rectify the majority of detrimental interventions to the façade.

CRITERIA AND METHODOLOGY

Significance is the industry-standard term given to the total sum of the cultural and heritage values that make a place special to this and future generations. It encompasses not just the physical fabric of a built but also its setting, contents, use, history, traditions and wider context; these may be tangible or intangible (i.e. physical or thematic). It is therefore unique to each place and relative significance can vary from element to element: a building may be significant for one or several overarching reasons, but a specific element may be more or less significant than the whole for different reasons.

The methodology used in this assessment of significance is taken from definitions, requisites and guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Historic England Advice Note 12 ('Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets').

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

No. 139 Oxford Road exhibits some architectural and historic interest. It is illustrative of the mid-to-late Victorian terrace style which historically characterised Oxford Road. It is a prominent feature in the streetscape due to its combination of ground floor retail space and residential accommodation above.

Very few of the terraced properties on Oxford Road maintain their original projecting shopfronts, most having been irreversibly altered or entirely removed, as in the case of Nos. 154-182 on the north side of the street. No. 139 retains several elements which constituted the original shopfront; including glazed panels divided by mullions, a timber stallriser and fascia board, a rusticated surround to the left-hand door, a recessed doorway providing access to the shop and entrance tiles. The fanlight over the left-hand doorway may still be in situ behind later interventions, though there is potential to confirm this through opening-up. Although some existing fabric has been obscured by modern alterations (in the case of the fascia board and stallriser for instance), the property demonstrates a high integrity of historic shopfront features, particularly within the context of the local streetscape.

As well as the architectural and aesthetic significance contributed by the surviving historical fabric of the property, No. 139 has historic value through its ability to illustrate the historic development of Oxford Road over the course of the 19th century. No. 139 was erected between 1879 and 1900 along with several terraces constituting part-commercial/part-residential properties, which served the growing population of late Victorian Reading. It demonstrates the development of Oxford Road and indeed wider national trends in response to the advent of train travel, population growth and the industrial revolution.

The special interest of No. 139 is also complemented by, and contributes to, the wider setting of Oxford Road and other contemporary buildings. Most important is No. 141, to which No. 139 is adjoined and with which it shares a list entry. No. 139 has Group Value with Nos. 209, 273 and 127, where the historic shopfronts also survive in their entirety.

PLANNING POLICY

The Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted in November 2019 and contains the policies against which the proposals discussed here will be measured. The relevant sections are Chapter 4.2 (Built and Natural Environment), and policies EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas), EN4 (Locally Important Heritage Assets) and OU5 (Shopfronts and Cash Machines).

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 directs that, in determining planning applications, 'special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance' of any affected conservation area. The Act also prohibits 'any works for the demolition of a listed building or for its alteration or extension in any manner which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest'. Under paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework, due consideration should also be given to the setting of any heritage asset affected by proposals.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

An assessment of impact measures the special interest of the identified heritage assets against the degree of change proposed. This is to identify where there is potential for the local authority to verify associated benefits or determine that harm would be caused by the proposals, and subsequently to incorporate mitigation measures in order to reduce or eliminate this. It is recognised by the heritage sector that there is no defined calculation or matrix by which to assess heritage impact and that such assessment should be provided as a narrative founded on understanding the significance of the heritage assets affected. The degree to which the proposed development positively or negatively impacts the identified heritage is measured according to the following criteria.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

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CONSEQUENCE OF PROPOSED CHANGE	LEVEL OF IMPACT
The proposal considerably enhances the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.	High Positive
The proposal enhances to a clearly discernible extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/ or the ability to appreciate that special interest.	Moderate Positive
The proposal enhances to a small extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.	Minor Positive
The proposal does not change the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.	None
The proposal damages to a small extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.	Minor Negative
The proposal damages to a clearly discernible extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/ or the ability to appreciate that special interest.	Moderate Negative
The proposal damages to a clearly discernible extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/ or the ability to appreciate that special interest.	High Negative

Proposal	Assessment	Level of impact
Doff clean stonework and re-point with lime mortar to match existing	Removing modern paintwork from the stonework of the residential flat above the shopfront using an appropriately sensitive technique and repointing with lime mortar will reveal the quality of the red brickwork and window heads. Red brick is the most common cladding material on the road and therefore is in keeping with the character of the wider setting. Removal of modern paintwork and repointing with lime mortar will also enable the building to breath more effectively, thereby protecting the surviving fabric against further deterioration.	High Positive
Remove/re-fix redundant cables and fixings.	Replace uPVC gutter and downpipe of the front elevation with cast iron. These proposals will improve the visual appearance of the building and remove obvious modern interventions, thereby enhancing its aesthetic and historical significance.	Medium Positive
Remove plastic box fascia and reinstate timber fascia	The timber fascia which is presumed to survive beneath the modern plastic signage is of high aesthetic and historical value to the property and the character of the streetscape. Reinstating the proportionate timber fascia will enhance the aesthetic and historic significance of the shopfront and improve its visual relationship with No. 141.	High Positive
Redecorate shopfront in muted colour	The shopfront has recently been re-painted and is no longer bright blue as it was when the proposals were first developed. It is proposed to redecorate the whole of the refurbished shopfront to match the existing green/grey colour scheme which is far more muted and in keeping with the historic character of the street.	Medium Positive
Replace existing PVC and aluminium doors with new insulated timber doors.	Re-centre right-hand door. Remove the flues and open up/reinstate fanlight on the left-hand door and transom light above right-hand door. Reinstating timber doors will remove further obviously modern interventions which detract from the architectural and historical significance of the property. Re-centring the right-hand door, which involves removing the narrow, glazed panel to the right of the current door frame, will strengthen the visual relationship with No. 141. Re-instating the fanlight and transom light will enhance the architectural and historic value of the property.	High Positive
Removal of modern panelling to stallriser. Reinstate timber drip detail and panelling detail to stallriser.	This proposal will create a sympathetic relationship between the stallrisers of No. 139 and No. 141. It will also enhance the special interest of the building by reinstating an important historical feature.	Medium Positive

CONCLUSION

Overall the proposed alterations to the façade of No. 139 Oxford Road will strongly enhance its significance. Through careful restoration, key historical features which characterise this property as a late Victorian shopfront will be recovered and conserved. Where this is not possible, as may be the case for the fanlight over the left-hand door, features will be reinstated that are in keeping with the historic character of the property such that its significance is respected. The proposals will also augment the group value of Nos. 139 and 141 as a notable pair and strengthen the buildings' contribution to the historical character of Oxford Road.

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