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READING CENTRAL CLUB MURAL

TEMPORARY PROTECTION

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Reading Central Club Mural

The Relocation or Replication of the Mural

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Reading Central Club Mural

The Relocation or Replication of the Mural

1.0 Background

The Reading Central Club (London Street, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 4QA) was a well-known centre for cultural events used mainly by the African Caribbean community, between 1999 and its closure in 2005. The building is well known for its colourful mural depicting local and global aspects of Black History commissioned in 1988 by Reading Borough Council.

The following report assesses options for relocating or replicating the mural if development work takes place in the building or its immediate vicinity. The report, commissioned by Reading Borough Council, formed part of a survey of the mural carried out between the 9th and the 20th of October 2017. The condition of the mural is discussed together with a brief description of conservation proposals that might be carried out in conjunction with protection and relocation works.

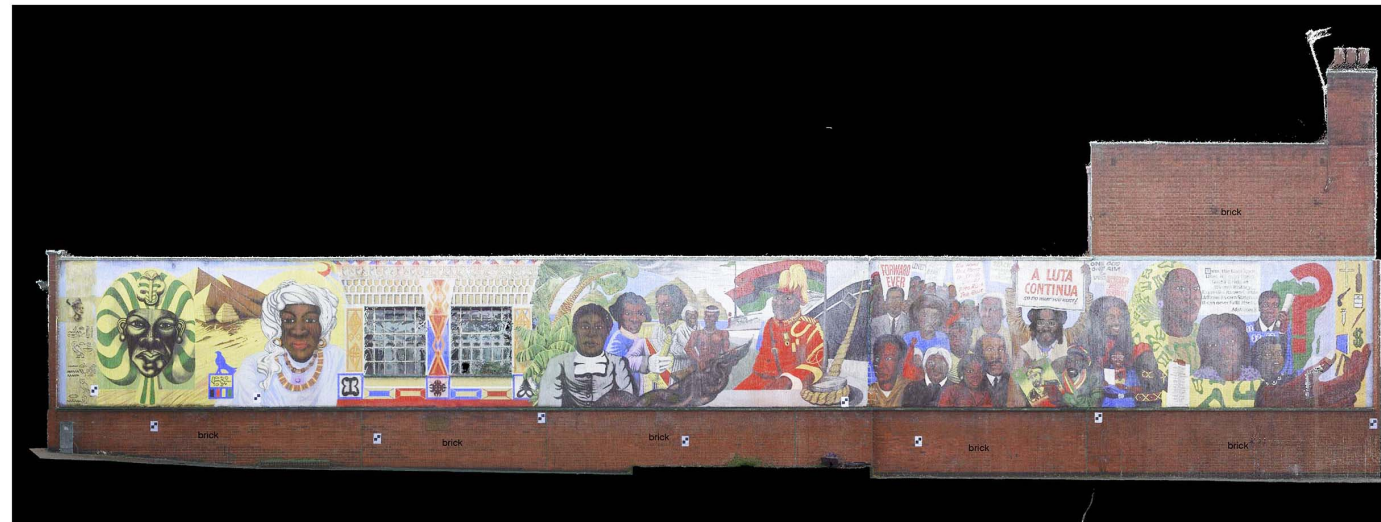
2.0 Description

The mural spans the length of the former Central Club building, along the north façade facing Reading's Inner Distribution Road (IDR). It is located approx. 2m from street level and measures approx. 35m in length and approx. 4.5m in height, covering a total area of some 157.5m². It is painted on approx. 2-3cm thick cement render within a metal frame inset into the brick façade.

The artist Alan Howard and his team painted the mural with images of the people of Reading who were involved in founding Central Club together with positive historical Black role-models. The painting is presented as a montage of iconic figures depicting significant people and moments in black history going back to ancient Egypt. The mural starts on the left with a series of hieroglyphs above and below a bust of Nefertiti, which translate as something like: 'Rage is what God loves to hearken to: and you should live up to yourself in his name'¹. Nefertiti was the wife of the 18th Dynasty Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten (reigned 1351-1334 or 1353-1336 BC) whose huge head stands against the backdrop of the Pyramids of Giza and below him a cartouche bearing his name in hieroglyphs. The mural contains other important black religious and political leaders such as Toussaint l'Ouverture, Emperor Haile Selassie, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Bob Marley, Harriet Tubman and others. The last panel of the mural and the various symbols presented look to the future and depicts a variety of tools that people might use to shape that future.

¹ Montserrat, D. - 'Akhenaten: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt' Publ. Routledge 2002 p166-117

The mural spans the length of the entire north façade of the former Central Club building on the existing brick wall, which is approximately 6.5m in height. The upper metre of the wall is exposed to the elements on both sides, and forms the parapet wall to the flat roof behind. At the west end of the wall the building behind is taller.



Level Datum 95.00m

Reading Central Club Mural Elevation

change

change

Notes.

Levels related to a local level datum.

Rev	Details of Revision				Drawn	Date
Surveyed	Drawn	Date	Checked	Date	Approved	Date
RR	RW	04/07/17	ROT	04/07/17	ROT	04/07/17



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Title.

ELEVATIONS
READING CENTRAL CLUB MURAL
LONDON STREET
READING
RG1 4QA

Dwg No. **170521 ELE** Sheet **1 of 1**

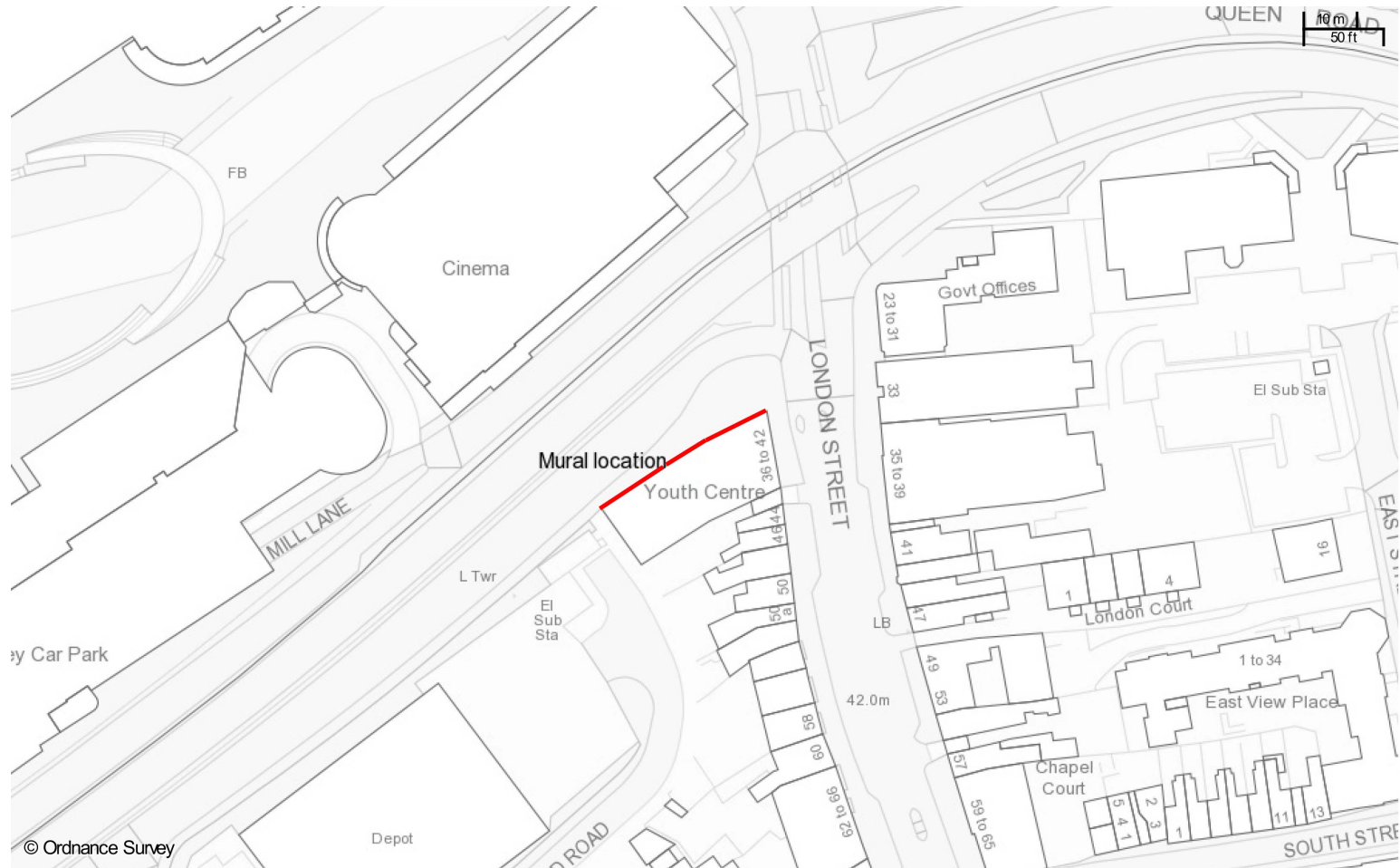
Scale 1:100 A2 Sheet Rev. -

3.0 Location

Site address:

Reading Central Club
London Street
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 4QA

The mural is located
on the external north
-facing wall of the
former Reading
Central Club building



© Ordnance Survey

Black History Mural Location

Scale: 1:1000

Printed on: 6/7/2017 at 12:49 PM

PLAN NOT TO
SCALE



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4.0 Condition

The mural was painted between 1988 and 1990 on the north wall of the Reading Central Club. The building is currently unoccupied and the mural is subject to daily fluctuations in environmental conditions and exposure to the elements, as it has been for the last 27 years. The interior of the building was not examined.

4.1 Support

The mural was executed on an existing wall, of brick construction, onto which a new support was prepared for the purpose. Whilst much of the support is hidden behind the mural itself there are areas of localised damage which allow the structure to be examined. The painting is executed over a hard cementitious render applied to an expanded metal lath (EML) support, affixed to the brick wall behind using screws and washers. The EML appears to be made of stainless steel and where exposed there were no signs of corrosion. In general the overall condition of the render can be described as good. The surface is cohesive and the cementitious render remains materially sound.

Percussion tests carried out across the entire surface indicate that there are areas where the render is partially detached from the support. However, there is no evidence of planar distortion, bulging or movement in the render so whilst some areas sound hollow they retain structural integrity, in part no doubt to the fact that it is executed on a secure expanded metal lath support which remains securely fixed to the brick wall.

The window area presents the only break in what is an otherwise continuous expanse of brickwork and has been subject to localised structural movement, which is evident at the corners of the reveals.

4.2 Ground

The even compact surface of the cementitious sandy render is covered with a white ground. The paint ground remains cohesive and well adhered to the render in almost all areas. Although some loss and erosion of the ground has occurred at the edges of larger cracks, most significantly where there has been minor structural movement around the windows and at the corners as mentioned above, in general the preparatory layer remains sound.

4.3 Paint Layer

Overall the condition of the mural appears to be good when initially viewed at a distance, but close examination reveals adverse long-term effects caused by water and weathering in almost all areas. Whilst the main body of the paint layer appears to be well bound and well adhered to the underlying zinc oxide ground, the binder has leached away at the surface with the result that touching any area of the mural results in pick-up of the pigment in that area. This problem affects all colours in all areas to some degree and results in a weak and powdery surface.

Paint analysis shows that the colours are made of pure pigments (red ochre, French ultramarine, chrome yellow, iron oxide yellow, Prussian blue, carbon black, iron oxide browns, titanium white and zinc white, etc.) and medium analysis shows that they are likely to be artist's alkyd oil colours.

4.4 Surface Coating

There is a semi-opaque surface coating on approximately three fifths of the mural, on the right (west) side. The layer is probably a varnish or protective surface coating which has itself now deteriorated, probably through a combination of UV oxidation and the effects of humidity. Paint analysis shows that the layer is thin and discontinuous and examination of the boundary between the coated and un-coated sides of the mural show that it was probably applied as a spray rather than a brush. The coating itself is badly degraded and can be flaked away revealing powdery, underbound pigment beneath.

4.5 Later Accretions

There are numerous traces of later material on the surface, but in general their effect is minimal possibly as a result of the regular uncontrolled 'washing' of the surface that occurs when there is rainfall. The main exception to this is areas of black mould on the upper part of the mural in the area protected from the elements by the parapet capping. In addition to airborne contaminants there are also localised areas of calcareous material in places.

5.0 Conservation Proposals

The long-term preservation of the murals is integrally linked with the building that forms its support. Proposals for the conservation of the mural have been provided in a separate report (*"Reading Central Club - Arte Condition Survey" 20.11.17*). Treatment proposals include the following: Initial Assessment, Surface cleaning, Varnish removal, Mould treatment, Temporary facing, Fixing areas of flaking paint, Paint Consolidation, Grouting areas of detachment, Rust treatment, Filling losses and cracks, Retouching.

6.0 Temporary Protection

It is understood that current proposals under consideration by Reading Borough Council include redevelopment of the site. Any structural work, demolition, etc. that take place in the immediate vicinity of the mural will risk damage to it and outline proposals for the protection of the mural have been provided in a separate report (*"Reading Central Club - Arte Protection Proposal" 20.11.17*).

7.0 Relocation or Replication

In recent years façade retention has come to be widely accepted as an important means of preserving our architectural heritage for the enjoyment of future generations. Façade retention has allowed the integrity of the existing townscape to be preserved and provides a way for attractive, architecturally or historically important facades to be retained whilst enclosing a new, well designed modern building behind. The retention of the mural wall would allow the preservation of the painting, which has considerable significance for the local community.

Whatever the nature of the development proposal it will be necessary to provide some form of protection against accidental damage during works. The proposed methodology for the protection of the mural includes the application of a vapour-permeable facing to protect against rain and airborne particulate matter, followed by the application of a layer of compressive impact protection, covered by dimensionally stable plywood boards. The process of encapsulation of the mural between the brick substructure and the plywood covering should ensure adequate protection to allow subsequent structural support of the wall using temporary scaffolding or a purpose-made steel support structure. Erection of scaffolding to the exterior face and structural supports for the wall to the internal face will allow the wall to be maintained in its current position whilst allowing control of the external finishes when required.

Temporary protection will be required at the top of the wall with heavy-duty polythene and plywood sheeting. Protection of this area should be independent of other structures as re-development of the site could provide an opportunity to improve long-term conditions for the mural and include new construction above. Should the mural be incorporated into a new structure it might allow the introduction of a protective covering or overhang to reduce weathering in the longer term.

The proposal allows for surface cleaning to remove superficial deposits prior to the application of surface protection. The cleaning should include mould treatment to reduce the risk of increased mould formation once the mural is covered. The application of a soft facing material consisting of Dupont Tyvek® 1442R² will ensure that gritty matter does not become trapped and ground into the paint surface. The use of a vapour permeable Tyvek layer will ensure some breathability and reduce the risk of problems associated with the formation of condensation. Application of a compressive material such as expanded polystyrene boards will provide some protection against vibration and ensures that hard, potentially abrasive materials are not in direct contact with the wall. In addition the polystyrene provides some insulation against changes in external temperature and humidity. A final covering of plywood or OSB structural panels will provide both protection against impact damage and can be used to ensure that planar distortion of the mural surface is minimised. Plywood and OSB structural panels possess inherent strength and stiffness, are resistant to bending or deflection, racking or shape distortion. Offsetting the polystyrene boards and plywood and covering joints with structural timber will ensure water resistance

² Tyvek® is formed by a fully integrated process using continuous and very fine fibres of 100 per cent high-density polyethylene that are randomly distributed and non-directional. These fibres are first flash spun, then laid as a web on a moving bed before being bonded together by heat and pressure - without the use of binders, sizes or fillers. Dupont Tyvek® 1442R 43gsm 145 micron thickness with anti-static finish to prevent dust attraction. Tyvek stops or filters out 99.9% of particles 0.5-0.7 micron. Liquid hold-out tests give Tyvek® the same high ratings, being non-absorbent and essentially inert. Tyvek® is a smooth, non woven mesh of 100% high-density polyethylene fibres. The material is lint-free, tear-resistant and water-resistant. Tyvek® provides a breathable membrane which prevents moisture from being trapped in the covered item and causing condensation.

If possible the protective boarding should be independent of scaffolding and other support structures that might be constructed as part of the development and it may be necessary to consider fixing directly through the mural in places to ensure that optimum strength and support is obtained. The nature of these fixings should be determined in due course but might entail the use of stainless steel threaded bar fixed through the wall with adjustable nuts allowing the mural to be sandwiched between the brick support and the structural timbers securing the ply wood or OSB covering. Any holes that are made in the mural can be filled and retouched later.

If demolition work is carried out to the building behind the mural it will be necessary to ensure that adequate structural support is provided for the wall with purpose-made steel support structures or similar. The removal of the existing roof and internal floors and exposure of the reverse of the wall to the elements will require the application of additional protection against rain. This might be in the form of heavy-duty polythene and battening or similar materials. It will be necessary for contractors to ensure that the reverse of the mural is adequately protected against impact damage, which might in part be through the installation of the structural support. Depending on the nature of the reverse of the wall and other internal structures it might be appropriate to consider the use of sprayed polyurethane foam. Such material can be readily applied and can provide an element of consolidation to the structure as well as providing insulation and water-resistance.

Reading Central Club Mural

Budget for Protection Works

1.1	Preliminaries and Initial Assessment	£	500.00
1.2	Surface Cleaning of mural to remove superficial dust, etc.	£	1,500.00
1.3	Mould treatment	£	600.00
1.4	Application of vapour permeable Tyvek covering	£	600.00
1.5	Installation of protective panel support	£	4,500.00
	Total Labour (excl. VAT)	£	7,700.00
1.6	Tyvek 100m rolls x 2	£	500.00
1.7	Compact 50mm Polystyrene Insulation boards	£	1,200.00
1.8	25mm Plywood support	£	1,800.00
1.9	Timber batten	£	1,200.00
1.10	Fixings	£	300.00
	Materials (excl. VAT)	£	5,000.00
1.11	Travel	£	300.00
1.12	Accommodation	£	1,100.00
	Treatment Total (excl. VAT)	£	14,100.00

Timescale: Allow up to 3 weeks on site

Excludes cost of scaffold to be provided by the client to the conservator's specification

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