



## LONDON OFFICE

Mr Chris Keen  
The Keen Partnership  
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Edinburgh Road  
Reading  
RG30 2UA

Direct Dial: 020 7973 3635

Our ref: PA01160449

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021

Dear Mr Keen

### **EAS Pre-application Advice**

#### **75-77 LONDON STREET, READING RG1 4QA**

Thank you for involving us in pre-application Extended Advisory Service.

Historic England provided written advice on original proposals at the above site as part of our initial pre-application service on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021. At that time, we provided a summary on the significance of the site, as well as policy considerations. Accordingly, we will not repeat them here.

### **Advice**

Following extended consultation, we consider that the latest iteration, illustrated on revision G of The Keen Partnership's drawings No. 9018, has succeeded in positively addressing our initial heritage concerns for the redevelopment of the Olympia Hall's site, while retaining the overall intentions of the original proposals.

As previously envisaged, the rear elevation of 75-77 London Street would be repaired and extended at ground floor level to accommodate three residential units with private gardens. However, the footprint of the extension has now been beneficially reduced in depth and its building line designed as an offset of the existing. Reinstated communal gardens in a section of the cleared Olympia Hall's area, would provide screening to the extension, while focussing views to the more significant repaired/reinstated upper levels above the proposed first-floor balcony guarded by appropriate Georgian-style railings.

The redevelopment of the substantial area resulting from the proposed demolition of the Olympia Hall, originally saw the erection of a stark contemporary and bulky four-storey residential block centred on the rear elevation of the listed buildings. This proposal has now been replaced by a more sympathetic scheme including two smaller blocks of low-rise vernacular-style houses located along the eastern and western site boundary, hinting to proportions and character of original mews property. A reduced number of car parking bays (six instead of nine) screened by trees and shrubs would be located



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behind and next to the existing masonry wall enclosing the separately-owned parking area fronting East Street.

The reduction in massing and scale and the formation of a wide central pathway would open up important views and provide a visual corridor for the appreciation of the rear elevation of the Georgian houses and their reinstated gardens. This would result in a significant improvement of the current street-scene along East Street, where historical gardens have been replaced by car parking and mediocre modern development, adversely impacting its original character and appearance.

In conclusion, the proposed repairs of the Georgian houses and the provision of sympathetic development within their setting would result in an enhancement of the significance of the listed buildings and of the currently neglected character and appearance of the conservation area. In our view, the identified heritage and public benefits would justify the loss of the aesthetically mediocre but locally-valued Olympia Hall.

On this basis, we consider that, overall, the proposals would meet the requirements of paragraphs 200 and 206 of the National Policy Framework (NPPF 2021).

We recommend, however, paying attention to quality of materials and detailing for the repair/reinstatement of existing fabric and for the new development to ensure that these are appropriate and sympathetic to the historical character of the listed building and conservation area.

In particular, the masonry on the rear elevation of the listed houses includes a modern cement-rendered area. It would be beneficial to remove this inappropriate coating and expose the concealed brickwork to provide a consistent appearance to the rear elevation. However, the proposed intervention is subject to the establishment of the current condition of the brickwork, as the render removal may cause significant and more harmful structural damage.

## Next Steps

We consider your proposals have now reached a stage where they address any heritage considerations we may have.

However, we recommend paying attention to the choice of materials and detailed design, as outlined above, in order for the proposed development to succeed in effectively and sympathetically requalifying the surrounding environment, as currently envisaged.

Yours sincerely  
Luciana Gallo

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