

No 27/33 Christchurch Road,

Reading, Berkshire

OS Grid: SU721722

Listed building Appraisal and Heritage Impact assessment

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Introduction

This report gives an appreciation from a historical and architectural aspect, of the above dwellings on the basis of a request by Bluebird Design Services and a site visit in September 2022. The author is a retired professional academic in the field of Built Environment and has experience of historic buildings and their statutory listing since the 1970's in Berkshire. He also advises an Anglican Diocese. The report covers the setting and structure of the building together with some comments on their conservation. The report is neither a structural survey nor an economic appraisal. Access was limited to parts of the buildings. It is presented and accepted on the basis that liability of all types is limited to the fee paid. If this is not acceptable, then another consultant must be engaged. It is presented in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy 128 (Appendix 1) to enable assessment of the buildings' significance and their effect on the ambient heritage.

1 The Setting

The history of the manor of Whitley is described in the Victoria County History of Berkshire, Volume3, pages 367. A more recent local text is that of Wood, D, "Views from the Hill", 2017, Scallop Shell Press. The terrace stands at the top and on the west side of Kendrick Road, a dramatic tree lined avenue leading up to Woodyer's Christ Church and has been included in the Christchurch Conservation Area from the start. The terrace originally stood alone in the countryside at the top of the hill, with commanding views North over the Thames. The development of this area was stimulated by its healthy upland air and spring

water supply in contrast to the dense town centre close to the rivers. Other large houses were built from the 1850's, typically large Stucco Italianate buildings of a rather heavy mannered style, such as Whitley Grove, Whitley View, Cintra Lodge, Sutherlands and High Grove. These have mostly succumbed to redevelopment because of their large plots and excessive size. Infill has continued with late Victorian and Arts and Crafts villas being built of a more domestic scale and with pleasing exteriors. Unfortunately, Christchurch Road forms the main (A327) arterial road into Reading from the South East which limits the attraction of these houses for single family occupation.

2 The Buildings

The buildings lie on an East - West Axis on the north side of Christchurch Road diagonally opposite the parish church. The terrace forms part of a larger feature; Whitley Crescent and its South facade is shown in Figure 1, looking East, with the buildings in question at the far end. The buildings are architecturally described in Appendix 2. This was developed progressively, after Whitley Villa, the listed three bay detached house on the corner of Highgrove Street. Nos 5,6,7 were the first of the terrace, followed in two stages by Nos 9 – 11, then 13 - 25, finally this present group of four houses, with with better details. No 3 was added last, with later discordant Victorian details (reportedly in 1887, for a previous owner of Whitley Villa).



Figure 1: Whitley Crescent, South view

Figure 2 shows the houses that are the subject of this application, at the junction of Christchurch Road and Kendrick Road.



Figure 2: Nos 27, 29, 31, 33, South Facade

Figure 2 shows a brick terrace fronted in stucco, scribed to represent stone ashlar (showing the change in fashion from red brick) three storeys, with first floor string course. There are 16 pane sash windows to ground and 12 to the first floors, although No 27 has had unsympathetic uPVC replacement with wrong glazing bars. The ground floor windows are in segmental arched recesses, with smaller, square wall attic windows. There are good West front doorways flanked by fluted quadrants with panelled doors with roundels and radiating segmental fanlights above. The stacks are to the East side of each house. The houses have a basement which forms the ground floor at the rear because of the falling ground level. There are iron railings that appear contemporary with the houses.



Figure 3: North (rear) Facade, from Kendrick Road

The East side is also rendered but the rear is of brick with (now) irregular fenestration, partly later (Figure 2). The window openings have cheaper shallow arches of brick headers rather than the flat dove-tails of gauged, rubber brick that would be seen on a frontage (as seen on Nos 15 – 25). While this view was not originally meant to be seen, it is now an important frame to the top of Kendrick Road and its poor condition merits improvement. It appears that the original window pattern was; a single attic window on the East side, a single piano nobile window again on the East side, repeated on the ground floor. The basement had irregular single storey extensions from the C19, leaving a poor rear ground level appearance. Additional windows have been inserted, added to those listed above. Some are attempts at matching the original windows in size and symmetry, others are of various sizes reflecting the internal adaptations and two intrusive rear exits with stairs that have been inserted. This

gives the rear a jumbling unkempt appearance, worsened by the DIY surface drains that have been added and then leaked over a period, staining the brickwork. This is particularly regrettable as the rear flanks the top of Kendrick Road, framing the church, one of Reading's finest views.

3 Interiors

No 29 has the least changes internally and has some good if simple interior fittings, shown below in Figure 4, 5. Not shown is the chimney piece and staircase Newell post.



Figure 4: Ground Floor reception room showing some elegant panelling



Figure 5: Basement room

Other houses, from images seen, appear to be in better repair and decorative order than the exterior of the houses suggests. Figure 6 shows the rear attic bedroom of No 33.



Figure 6: Rear Attic Bedroom of No 33, showing possible extra left window.

4 Interpretation

The buildings comprise of a late Georgian terrace (Georgian in the sense of Hanoverian) from the late Regency period when stucco was more in fashion than red brick. The doorways are well treated with quadrants, a moulded freeze and fanlight and carefully fashioned, distinct panelled doors, three of which seem original. The ground floor windows are set in segmental arched recesses with glazing bars to all sashes. One ground floor window has been replaced with a thick uPVC framed sash window with a discordant glazing bar pattern. The original plan of the houses was typical of the period with two rooms on each of the four floors with a side staircase. The rear of the terrace shows much variation of the basic plan both from early and recent alterations, as the window pattern is not now uniform. There are some irregular rear extensions at basement level, possibly for early kitchens or w.c.'s.

It has only been possible to inspect one house, No 29 internally but this was found to be relatively intact with a simple early C19 interior with 6 panelled doors, thin mouldings to skirtings and architraves, a characteristic g.f. front room chimney piece with roundels, double

6 panelled partition doors between g.f. rooms and a delicate staircase with turned Newell posts and banister. The Client has stated that nothing remains historically in the other three houses which have been subdivided and altered radically. The existing plans show removed chimney breasts, staircases and internal walls. There is now an upstairs passage way between Nos 31, 33.

5 Heritage assets

One may itemise the heritage assets generally as follows.

1. The South frontage. This is a restrained Regency terrace of four houses with regular window openings having sliding sash timber windows with glazing bars, reducing in scale with height, having and contemporary doorways. The roof is contemporary, of the shallow pitched, slated type with surviving stacks. There are mostly surviving contemporary wrought iron railings. It has group value in the sequence of Whitley Crescent and with the general view up Kendrick Road of the parish church. Most details survive although poorly maintained. This is considered of **High Value**.
2. The North (rear) frontage. As with Georgian houses generally, this is much more cheaply constructed with just facing bricks and without gauged brick arches. It has had many alterations and insertions, reducing the rhythm of the regular window spacing. The lower two floors are the worst affected. However, it does frame the view to the top of Kendrick Road (or avenue!) as well as the church spire. This would normally be accounted as having low heritage value but its highly visible position in this important urban view means that it ought to be accorded **Medium Value**.
3. The interior of No 29 though quite plain has some significant surviving features, such as the panelled doors and moulded woodwork, particularly on the ground floor. The staircase has good turned Newell posts with square balusters. There is also a Regency chimney piece in the reception room. Often the details in upper floors were plainer, without mouldings such as in bedrooms, where visitors would not see. These details are of **Medium Value**.
4. The rear (North) of the curtilage has some garden space for Nos 27,29, with car parking for Nos 31, 33. There are low single course dividing walls between the existing garden spaces which are poorly maintained. These spaces may be said to

have **Low Value**, only having any value for their effect on the Listed Buildings adjacent and the surrounding views.

6 Heritage Impact Assessment

The Listing highlights the importance of the terrace historically and architecturally. Its several group values (as a part of a longer terrace and relation to Kendrick Road and the parish church) are brought out in the Conservation Area designation. Thus the retention and enhancement of the four houses is highly desirable. The present state of the buildings' main frontage is poor with the timber windows and doors to the main frontage being unmaintained or in one case badly replaced. The featured timber doors have been allowed in three cases to rot for want of simple painting. To the rear, poor external drains have been allowed to leak for extended periods, staining the brickwork and possibly re-entering the building at window openings – a health hazard.

Clearly, this state of affairs should not have arisen and the present proposal for refurbishment should in general therefore be warmly welcomed. The developer will no doubt have given consideration to the optimum sustainable tenure for these houses; whether of multiple, rented occupation or of return to single dwelling houses (at lower conversion cost) for rent or sale. Whichever conclusion is drawn, the desirability either to future owner or tenant will be enhanced by sympathetic conversion of these houses to their future arrangement. The surviving internal features of the staircase and ground floor woodwork should be preserved where possible (without excessive application of current building regulations). The other three houses in poorer condition could have some features re-instated conservatively, such as the simple skirting and architrave mouldings on the ground floor. No 29 provides the pattern. Conjectural “neo-Georgian” work should be avoided – this rarely works and honest simple modern fittings usually set off surviving features such as barred windows to the best effect.

7 Detailed Comments

No 27's frontage has been marred not just by neglect but by window replacement, as shown in the “before” image in Figure 4 and the “after” image of Figure 5.

The problems of sash window maintenance are worth mentioning. As these are of timber they require painting at modest intervals. In addition, the frames can suffer rot in the sills. This

however is capable of remedy as the sill can be cut out and replaced with a hardwood section. Similarly, the sashes may well only need preparation and painting. The desire for double glazing can be met by internal glazing, although this can affect the character of the room adversely. An attractive option now available is the use of replacement timber sashes having correct glazing bar spacing and thickness but fitted with sealed double glazing with 8mm air gap. An example of such a heritage installation is to be found in No 46 Redlands Road, an iconic building recently restored. Similarly old doors are repairable as the wedges may be removed to separate the styles and then replace any defective components. This is often cheaper than full replacement although it is a more skilled operation than installing standard imported components. Examples of this reprehensible practice are found in neighbouring houses along the extended terrace where absurd fanlight doors have been installed in doorways already having fanlights.



Figure 4 Image of South frontage of No 27 prior to window replacement



Figure 5: Present day window replacement, with incorrect glazing bars.

The presence of stored waste bins is a particular eyesore for a Georgian terrace, particularly when they could be kept at the rear.

The rear facade while normally of low value is particularly visible and the proposal is analysed as follows. The existing and proposed rear facades are shown in Figure 6 below.



Figure 6: Existing and Proposed rear (North) Facades

The original features may mostly be detected through regular repetition although some early alterations to suit individual occupiers are possible. This suggests that the leftmost windows on each floor of each house were part of the original symmetrical composition. An extra attic

window is present in No 33. This must be early as it matches the details on the others as does its middle floor window (which is proposed for removal). The smaller windows on Nos 27 and 31 must be much later as they do not respect the symmetry and so may be dated to c1900.

Nos 27 and 31 have intrusive rear entrances at first floor level which suggest post 1945 conversions. No 29 has an added half landing window and all have untidy basement rear extension contributing to the present jumbling untidy appearance which is difficult to maintain.

The proposed alterations consist of removing some of the additions, raising one first floor window and adding one attic window (both No 29). Three of the smaller added windows are retained for lighting of the internal spaces. Also the untidy basement level is cleared and a two-storey extension is proposed. The reason for this is that the classic Georgian plan is for two rooms on each floor with a side- or centre- stairwell. This is particularly difficult to adapt to modern purposes in smaller houses, where bathrooms and kitchens are required on ground and first floors. The upper floor plans are satisfactory for bedrooms. A previously proposed flat roof has been rightly replaced by a shallow pitched slated roof of a type appropriate to the era.

Considering the upper two storeys, the proposed elevation provides much tidying with removal of external drains and some sympathetic window alterations. The addition of a second attic window to No 29 balances the others and consideration might be given to adding similar to Nos 27 and 29 where the internal plan allows. Similarly, the necessity and expense of adding the first floor window to No 29 might be questioned as it has not been seen necessary in neighbouring identical proposed layouts. This would give the upper floors more symmetry and marginally improve the rear facade. Against this might be set the generally satisfactory nature of the proposal and the argument that this might be conjectural restoration, although it would be for internal planning consistency. It is a minor issue that should not affect the outcome of the application.

The two storey extension of the lower floors requires careful consideration. Its functional justification is as stated the inadequacy of the two-room per level Georgian house plan as evidenced by the poor existing rear extensions. In addition, the rear is spoilt by the stepped access points and other defacing alterations. Thus, whether the houses were to be left as single family houses or converted the better into flats, the extensions would be desirable. This

would be for both floors as access to the extra space is needed on the ground floor as well as the basement. Having established the principle, the form of the extensions and their openings should be considered. A single mass conforms best to the main terrace (rather than the present random rear extensions) and its proposed roof uses the vocabulary of the period without being conjectural. The window details are correct in being a recessed central sash barred window with flat brick fan-tail arch over. The basement exit which is largely hidden from view has a French window with barred side lights. The outer houses have their extensions slightly narrowed to allow no doubt for party walls .

Externally, Nos 31, 33 have tarmac parking spaces with the other two houses having poor gardens with low dividing brick walls. This could usefully be formed into a single space both to allow car parking and to give some grassed shared amenity space to residents. This would enhance the space at the top of Kendrick Road and its important views.

8 Conclusions

The houses have significant heritage value on both facades and internally. The conversion mostly improves the existing tenanted accommodation.

The sash windows should be repaired (and re-instated in the case of No 27). The frames probably only need new sills and the sashes may be repairable or replaced by the novel 8mm gap double glazed units now locally available (see the repair of the iconic 46 Redlands Road). These would have the added attraction of reducing road noise penetrating into the South facing rooms. The stucco should be prepared for repainting, recovering the scribing where possible. Both a breathable white, or a Bath Stone colour would be suitable. The entrance doors and doorways are particularly important and the original doors should be repaired where possible by removing wedges, dismantling and replacing rotten panels rather than wholesale replacement. Where new mortar or plaster is required this should be of Lime without Portland cement to allow breathing. This will be particularly important for the basement and exterior walls.

While conjectural restoration is not required, the retention of original features particularly in No 29 would enhance the property. In the other houses, some conservative re-instatement of mouldings, skirtings, architraves, doors might be attempted, but perhaps only on the ground

floor hallway and front room. The upper floors of such houses were generally very plain as they were not seen by visitors, so modern finishes (except for the windows) are satisfactory.

The four houses could benefit from the two storey rear extension both in internal planning and external visual amenity. Landscaping of the rear garden space into a coherent whole would further enhance the development.

One hopes that these properties will be brought back to life by a partnership of imagination and talent between owners, Architect and Planning Officer. This would transform both the end of Whitley Crescent and the view around the iconic parish church.

The forgoing report identifies the salient heritage features of the property as are apparent at this stage and discusses the harmony of the proposals with the heritage assets. It is hoped that these will assist the Borough Council Planning Office in coming to a favourable conclusion.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further clarification or assistance.

John F Missenden

21 October 2022

Appendix 1

NPPF Policy 128:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes or has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

Appendix 2

Historic England Entry:

CHRISTCHURCH ROAD

1.

5128

(North Side)

Nos 27 to 33 (odd)

SU 7272 9/84

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2.

Circa 1840. Built as part of Whitley Crescent. A good stucco terrace of 2 bay 3 storeys and basement houses. String at 1st floor level, eaves, hipped slate roof. Glazing bar sashes except on 2nd floors and upper sashes of No 27. Ground floor windows in segmental-headed recesses. Doors in deep recesses with fluted quadrant jambs, key-pattern frieze and radiating fanlights. Excellent panelled doors with large central rosette all similar (except for No 27 now replaced by poor modern door). Nos 27-31 (odd) retain fleur-de-lys rails.

Listing NGR: SU7215272227