

**Rear Extension
and
Replacement Garage**

at

**129 Whiteknights Road,
Reading RG6 7BB**

**Heritage Statement and
Impact Assessment
For Planning**



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Introduction

Who this Report is for

- 1.1 The owners of the site, Mr and Mrs Javaid, who are building for their own use.

Who this Report is by

- 1.2 Cornelius Kavanagh is an architect specialising in heritage who was a former partner at Hives Architects LLP but is now working freelance.

Purpose of this Report

- 1.3 The report accompanies a planning application for a house extension, and shows that heritage considerations were fully taken into account.

Scope of this Report

- 1.4 The report covers the application site, and its setting, i.e. public areas where the site can be seen from eye level.
- 1.5 The report is limited in depth to what is appropriate for an application of this kind.

Context

2 Physical Context

- 2.1 Whiteknights Road is flat, wide, and leafy. It is not particularly busy with traffic. The image to the right shows the site to the right with the Edwardian villas behind.
- 2.2 The West side of the street (to the left of the image above) is part of Reading University's Whiteknights Campus, and still has the feel of parkland, with specimen trees.
- 2.3 The East side has a series of two storey detached villas, in a typical Edwardian style. They are set back from the street with large front gardens used mainly for parking.
- 2.4 The neighbour to the South (No.131) is a 1970's building, formerly a bungalow (see image, right) but in the process of being increased to two storeys.



Context, Continued

3 Social Context

- 3.1 The area is suburban and residential. The applicant's family have lived here for decades and the applicant grew up in this area.
- 3.2 Although this house was originally built as a vicarage to St Peter's Church, the church (top right in the image right) is not particularly close to the site, and the two buildings cannot be seen together from any viewpoint.



Context, Continued

4 Heritage Context

- 4.1 The house is not a designated heritage asset.
- 4.2 To the south of the site, there are two gatehouse lodges which were built in the first half of the 19th century and are listed Grade II.
- 4.3 The site is not in a conservation area.
- 4.4 There is no stylistic continuity between the Edwardian neighbours and this building, which although built only a few years later, is conscious of the work of early modernists like Peter Behrens.

Context, Continued

5 Policy Context

- 5.1 The proposal is slightly too large to be covered by permitted development rights.
- 5.2 A decision has been made not to shoehorn the changes into the permitted development envelope but to take the best approach from the building's point of view.
- 5.3 Although the site is in Reading, the other side of the road is in Wokingham Borough, and this was so even when both were part of Berkshire County Council.
- 5.4 There are no protected trees on site.

Sources

6 Planning History

- 6.1 No significant extensions to the building have been made since it was built.
- 6.2 The existing prefabricated concrete garage was built under permitted development rights.
- 6.3 The Grade II listed Lodges have been refurbished in the last few years; in the case of North Lodge, the closer of the two, this work was done under (Wokingham) permission LB/2005/4767
- 6.4 131 Whiteknights Road, the neighbour to the south (and thus closer to the listed buildings) received permission for a second storey in 2020 - Permission 200894/HOU
- 6.5 The application to demolish No. 129 and build a dwelling taking the full width of the plot was 2001525, made by a different applicant, of a completely different nature and refused.

Sources, Continued

7 Documentary Sources

- 7.1 The Reading Conservation and Urban Design Officer, Bruce Edgar, wrote an extensive response objecting to the application to demolish 2001525, which contains useful research.
- 7.2 This report includes the fact that the replacement St Peter's Vicarage was designed c1925 by Frederick Earnest Briant Ravenscroft and built in the late 1920's. This tallies with the map evidence.
- 7.3 The records of St Peter's have not been checked by me, but I have no reason to doubt that this information is accurate.
- 7.4 The Church of England's CalmView Database includes a list of several local churches which Ernest Ravenscroft worked on - he is first noted as working on St. Andrew's Caversham in 1910-11(see image, right) at which time he would have been 35 years old.
- 7.5 The application to demolish No. 129 and build a dwelling taking the full width of the plot was 2001525, made by a different applicant, of a completely different nature and refused.
- 7.6 The St Andrews Caversham website contains research by Janina Hedger which states that "Two of the members [of the buildings committee were] named as Joint Architects: James Haslam and Ernest Ravenscroft, both living in St Peter's Avenue".
- 7.7 There is no record on Lambeth Palace's CalmView system of Ravenscroft working on St Peter's, but the records are incomplete. He is however noted as working for several local parishes until the 1950s - a long career.



Sources, Continued

8 Map Regression

8.1 All maps are 1:2500 Ordnance Survey mapping with the redline of the current application overlaid. There is no need to go further back than this.

8.2 1931

The site is much as it is now, with the exception of the fact that No. 131 was not yet built: in fact this does not appear on the 1969 map either.

St Peter's and its Church Hall are visible top right.



8.3 1912

The site is cleared, but the house is not yet built. This tallies with the written evidence that the house was built in the 1920s.

The Edwardian houses are not yet built either. There is a building to the northwest of the site, but it is built hard up against the road - perhaps a livery yard. It won't be there much longer.

"St Peter's Vicarage" is marked next to the old Vicarage. The parcel of land for the new vicarage has already been cut off its garden.



8.4 1899

Earley is very much still a village.

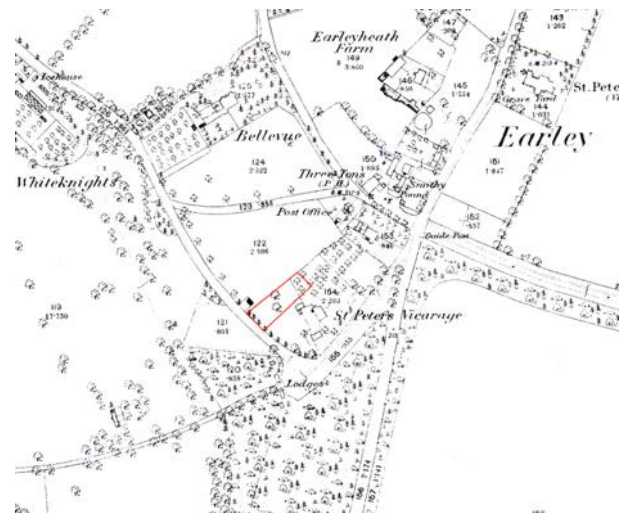
St Peter's Church Hall has not yet been built.



8.5 1879

The Old Vicarage and its garden (which includes our site) is shown with trees (possibly fruit trees) in rows, and a hedge next to the road.

The Old Vicarage itself is very much smaller - it may have been replaced entirely at this time or alternatively extended on all sides around an earlier core.



Sources, Continued

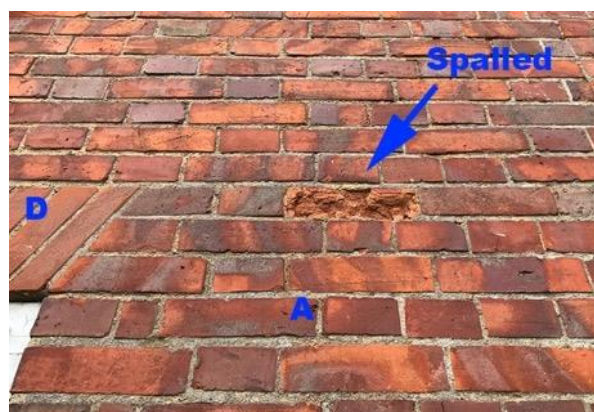
9 Physical Evidence

- 9.1 The majority of the brickwork of the original house survives. The contrast between the flat quoins (B) and the remainder of the facing brick (A) has largely been lost as the brick has mellowed with age. Unusually, the quoins are not set out long and short on the corners, but symmetrically on the corner as if they were rectangular blocks, but symmetrically on the corner as if they were square block 5 bricks high.

The special plinth bricks (E) are a nice feature, but the bricks below this have lost most of their mortar through freeze/thaw.

- 9.2 There are some signs of later change to the size and layout of window openings at the rear. In the case shown right, the five-course quoining has given way to three-course quoining (B) and a different brick has been used for the window surround (C). Even before these changes, asymmetry was part of the original design of the garden facade, which was much freer than the front, and based more on utility than on theory.

- 9.3 Brickwork has been repointed several decades ago in an impermeable mortar. This has caused spalling of some of the brick faces.



Heritage Assessment

10 Heritage Value

- 10.1 The house is an early example of the Neo-Georgian style that is particularly associated with the 'homes built for heroes' council housing such as Becontree (right).

As Bruce Edgar points out, Reading is very rich in small, later examples of this style. But the size and date of this house makes it more special.



- 10.2 While public architects were making the switch from Arts and Crafts to Neo-Georgian, the same switch was happening in the Garden City movement, and in the work of Edwin Lutyens. The illustration (right) is of Lutyens' Mells Park in Wiltshire, under construction in 1925.



- 10.3 The window openings to the front are set out in a formal way, to a classical rhythm, and symmetrically, unrelated to the layout of rooms behind. It is clear that architectural intent controlled the design of this facade.



- 10.4 At the rear, in contrast, windows have been placed in positions where they suit the internal layout, without regard for symmetry, even if this results in flat arches clashing with internal corners etc. There are two wings facing the garden, but they are not symmetrical either in length, width or height.



- 10.5 The special bricks that form a plinth are of value in themselves. Here, an alteration to the fenestration has happened at some stage, and standard bullnoses have been used.

Where sections of wall containing these special bricks are altered, the bricks should be kept for re-use.



- 10.6 Windows at the rear are often clearly not original. These rear facades are of little heritage value, and if changes need to be made, this would be a good place to start.



- 10.7 Windows at the front do seem to be original, but the timber sub-frame has not been provided with a drip, so the sills have all rotted.

This sort of window is more from the arts-and-crafts tradition, and is made from pegged oak. The steel Crittall windows should have been face fixed on the timbers, rather than recessed like this, which channels water onto the sill. Neo-georgian would generally use white sash windows, and the white paint here is not helping, or authentic.



- 10.8 The timber hood over the front door, while also original, is hollow and also suffering from rot.



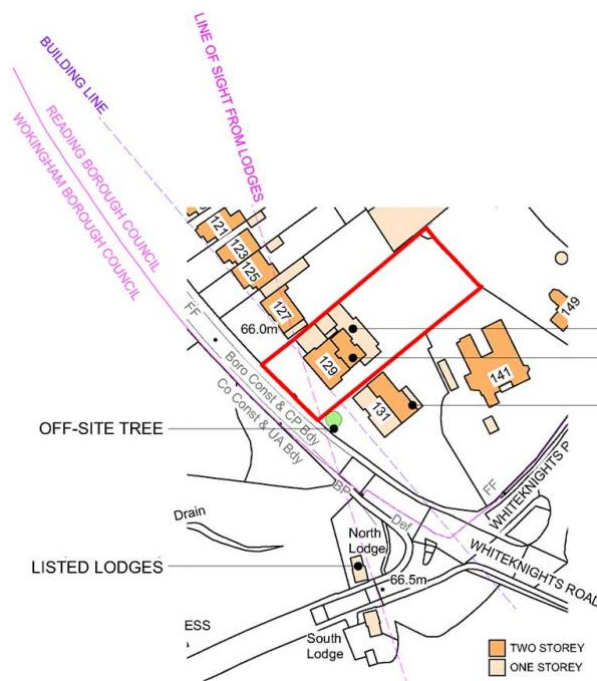
Heritage Assessment, Continued

11 Heritage Constraints

- 11.1 The design was developed to pre-application stage using the following guidelines:
1. The front part of the house should retain its appearance of being a square pavilion in the centre of the plot.
 2. Nothing should be done to make the street look like a continuous wall of building. No secondary entrance should detract from the front entrance.
 3. The rear extension needs to be subservient in height to the front part.
 4. Corners are important. Windows should be set back from the face of the walls.

These constraints were summarised in the diagram opposite, which was used by the designers to test the proposal against in order to minimise its heritage impact.

- 11.2 A pre-application was submitted on 23rd June 2021, and a meeting held on 27th July with Nathalie Weekes and Bruce Edgar, to discuss the Pre-app design.
- 11.3 At the meeting, the first constraint was tightened further: The proposed porch, although not larger than that allowed by permitted development, was considered to have a detrimental effect on the integrity of the street façade. Although the existing hood and door could be altered slightly, the modelling should not be altered.
- 11.4 The second constraint was refined at the meeting and it was agreed that the garage would be set back 2m from the front façade, and a visual gap maintained with No.127.
- 11.5 Constraint No. 3 was interpreted in the light of the general principle that the back could withstand significant alteration as long as the front was preserved was agreed.
- 11.6 The use of shadow gaps to give visual separation between old and new was agreed as a solution to Constraint 4.



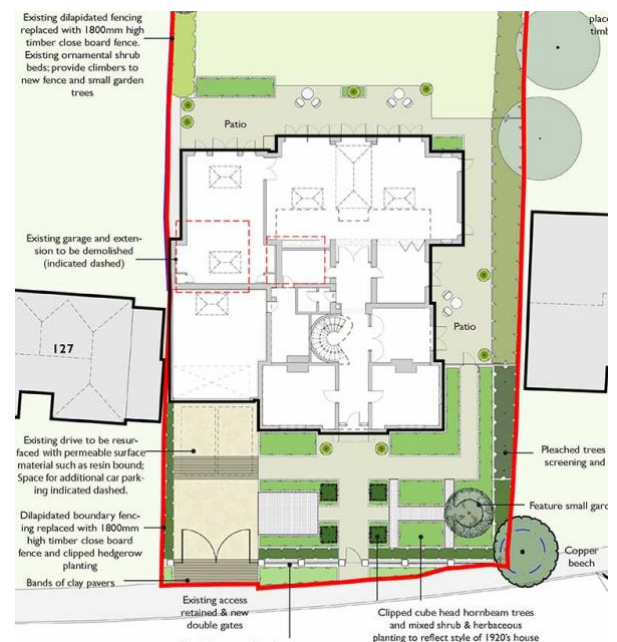
Heritage Assessment, Continued

12 Heritage Opportunities

- 12.1 The existing garage is unattractive and should be replaced.
- 12.2 The brickwork and gutters are in need of repair.
- 12.3 The windows suffer from a design flaw which has caused them to rot, so they need replacing. There is an opportunity to choose a replacement window that will draw no attention to itself and allow the brickwork to stand out.
- 12.4 The front garden is in a neglected condition. The back garden has signs of original brick terracing that has been allowed to decay. There is an opportunity to improve the soft landscaping front and back.

The drawing to the right shows a design by a professional Landscape Architect which gives the house back some of the formality of its original garden terraces.

Railings along the street side and low hedges smarter up the public face of the building, and the setting will transform the appearance of the house from austere to dignified.
- 12.5 Careful updating of services can preserve the building into the future.



Impact Assessment

13 Impact on Surroundings

- 13.1 There is an informal building line, and this is unaffected by the proposal.
- 13.2 The street consists of detached houses, with gaps between them. In complete contrast to the other proposal, this proposal does not extend the full width of the site. The garage is set well back, and the shape of the front part of the house will still read as it does now.
- 13.3 This house was always different from its neighbours. Its presence on the street will be minimally altered by this proposal.
- 13.4 The impact on the listed lodges will be insignificant. There is one place where the site can be seen together with these listed buildings. From the pavement in front of the South Lodge, the site appears to the right of the North Lodge, behind an off-site tree.
- 13.5 Even if the tree was not there, the side facade would be visible as it is now, and the rear extension almost completely hidden behind No. 131, which is currently being increased to two storeys.

Impact Assessment, Continued

14 Impact on Fabric

- 14.1 The brickwork at the front is to be retained. There is a significant loss of brickwork at the back, but the back is of far less heritage value.
- 14.2 The bricks arising from the alterations at the back will be reused at the front.
- 14.3 Windows are to be replaced but the original windows (where they still exist) suffer from a design flaw causing the subframe sill has rotted beyond repair. Traditional sash windows between fixed sashes would be a suitable replacement.
- 14.4 The front roof is part of the design intent, and is to be retained as it is. The rear roofs, which are to be altered, are of much less value.
- 14.5 The garage is to be removed; it is not original, and of no heritage value.
- 14.6 Fences are to be removed but these are standard modern close-boarded fences and of no value.
- 14.7 The hood over the front door, which is suffering from rot, is a small loss. It will be replaced using the design language of the original.

Heritage Assessment, Continued

15 Heritage Benefits of Proposal

- 15.1 The brickwork has been damaged by inappropriate pointing. Spalled bricks will be replaced individually with matching bricks salvaged from the alterations to the back.
- 15.2 The facade will be repointed in a permeable lime mortar. The brickwork will be washed with low pressure jets of plain water, which will bring out the difference in texture and colour of the quoins as originally intended.
- 15.3 There are some signs of internal condensation on plasterwork inside the building which will disappear once the new windows improve background ventilation.
- 15.4 Plastic rainwater goods will be replaced by cast-iron.
- 15.5 Windows on the frontage will have replacement metal casements that avoid the transfer of damp to the oak subframes which has led to their deterioration.

Conclusion

Acknowledgements

- 16.1 Maps are low-resolution screenshots of historical mapping, not for commercial use.
- 16.2 Photographs are the author's own, except for some scans of historic postcards, which are not for commercial re-use.
- 16.3 The diagram of townscape impact is by Hives Architects.

Summary of Findings

- 16.4 The front and side elevations of the house have heritage value worth preserving.
- 16.5 The proposal preserves these elevations and keeps views of them clear from the public realm.
- 16.6 The proposed changes to the windows and hood are in keeping with the style and architectural intent of the original house.
- 16.7 The rear of the house and the garage are not of heritage significance and the proposed changes to them are reasonable.
- 16.8 The new extension is visually subservient to the original house.
- 16.9 The proposal retains the long-term use of the building as a family home and allows this to continue into the future.