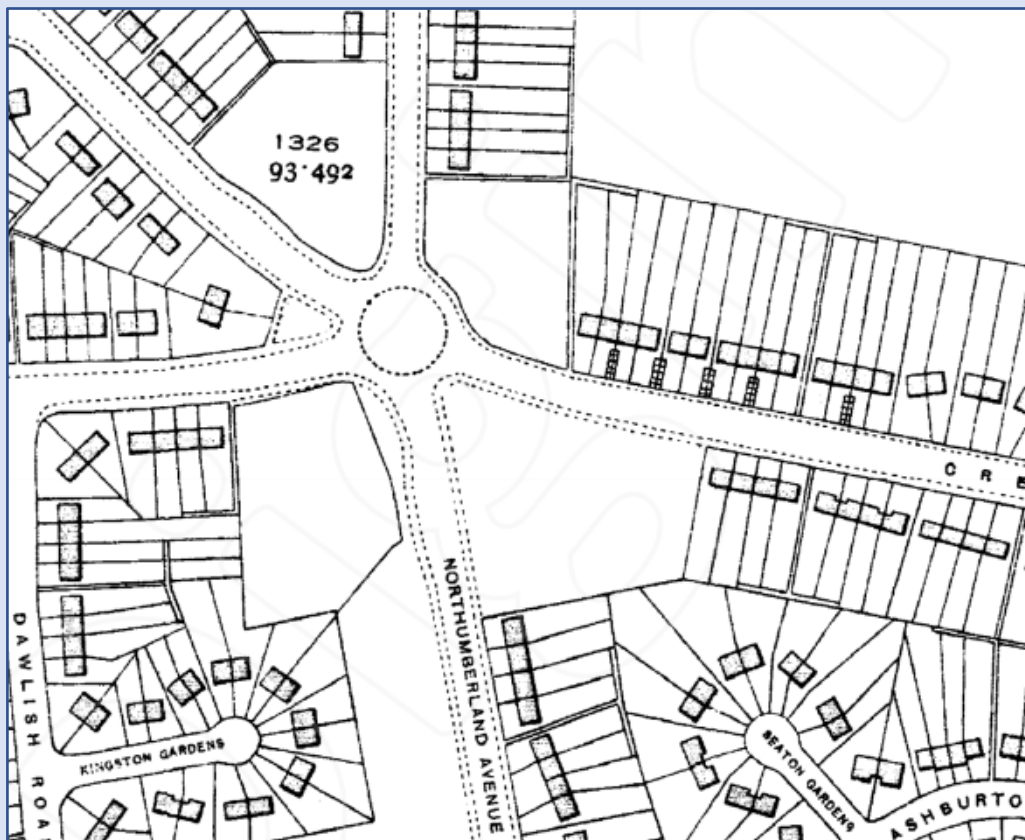


Project: Heritage Statement

Report: Heritage Statement for Planning Application Ref: 210537- 205



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Aims

The aim of this report is to assess the significance of the Whitley Library proposal's impact (via the proposal to develop car parking bays on adjacent land) on the Locally Listed building.

1.0 Brief History of Site

Whitley Library was opened on Tuesday 2 April 1935 (formerly known as South Branch Library) by the Mayor Dr G.H.R Holden. It was the first purpose-built community building in the centre of Whitley and has remained a socially important site since its inception. As a significant building in the development of the community of South Reading and appeared before the development of residential buildings in the area from the 1950s onwards.¹ The junction of Long Barn Lane, Northumberland Avenue and Cressingham Road (see Fig.2 Appendices) was seen as a hub for the area. Other pre-war community buildings in the centre of Whitley were Blagdon Road Nursery School opened in 1937, the Whitley Health and Maternity Clinic in 1938 and St Agnes' Church in 1939.

The library is stated to '*represent the pre-Second World War phase of development*' when the effects of urbanisation were beginning to be seen in South Reading. Other developments included the acquisition of Goddard's Farm for allotments (on Hartland Road) in 1930 and the eventual loss of George Palmer playing fields post Second World War to new housing developments which today stand to the rear of the site (see 4.0 Historic Maps). Since its inception the building has been extended to the eastern side (towards Cressingham Avenue) by the creation of a side single storey flat roof structure. It is unclear when this addition took place. Nonetheless, this has not detracted from the look and shape of the original building façade. Behind the library is a Second World War ARP post or shelter, this exists on site today to the rear of the site.

2.0 Character and Features

The proposed 'car park' location sits on an area of land that fronts onto a roundabout junction. The car park sits adjacent and dominated by the library building that remains as the only visible architectural feature (see 4.0 historic maps). The style of the building is stated in the listing to be '*characteristic of municipal and institutional developments in Reading at that time*' and referred to as 'the architecture of hope'. While the historic structure does have a unique frontage, it appears from the local listing that the sites importance is attributed to its historical social importance (referred to as having '*group value*') rather than an architectural feature on its own merit. This means the function of the site is as important to the history of South Reading as the building itself. It is therefore important that any new scheme understands the social importance of the site.

¹ It pre-dates the nearby community centre opened in the 1940s and which now houses Whitley Library which has now vacated the original building.

The main symmetrical façade is divided by a central-double pitched gable façade with stone detailing. The building is red-brick built and the main gable has a central stone plaque with surrounding wreath and the word “Library” in bronze in typical Art Deco style font. When opened in April 1935 the construction was described as brick, faced with two-inch bricks and the architect is unknown. The size of the building is relatively understated, exhibiting a human-scale however there are elements of detailing that are of interest. The brickwork is in Scottish bond (5 courses of stretchers and 1 course of burnt headers) and built in thin, 2-inch bricks with light mortar with sharp inclusions. Behind the projecting porch entrance is a two-storey height, symmetrical brick gable with stone parapet and two flanking, flat roofed ‘wings’.²

The architectural frontage has a distinctive geometric presence owing to its high-pitched gable and flatter side ‘wings’. The encased porch consists of an arched entrance built of sandstone ashlar with moulding and recessed doorway. There are stone surrounds around two flanking windows of sandstone with decorative squares in relief at the corners; the stone parapet the front gable is slightly concaved and continues around building. Original cast iron hoppers and down pipes are also in-situ on side elevations (see Fig 4 in 5.0). There is no known architectural feature on the rear elevation or the east-flank where a historic single storey extension has been added. The western side of the building (side of single storey addition) is the side to the proposed car-park and contains a flat-roof devoid of any detailing. Internally the space is organised around the central hall which benefits from a double height ceiling space. The side extension part accessed from the main hall and appeared as secondary space serving the main central atria space. There are no-known features internally to the building. All internal doors and surrounds are to be kept for the new-proposed use.

3.0 Proposed Use and Impact

Proposed Use Class (F2b)- Local Community use via the provision of Hall for meeting place for the principal use of the community.

The proposed use of the historic site as a community hub would envision the use of spaces via ad-hoc (evening events and play school) as well as regular weekend workshops. Care should be taken related to the refurb of the washrooms (adequate ventilation levels) and the proposal of any disability entrance should consider the existing openings and recesses of the doorways. Overall, the proposed usage and car park is believed to have minor impact on the site overall. Internal changes continue to use the general layout of spaces, retaining an open-plan layout.

The addition of the car park to the western side of the site will have a minimal impact on the historic architecture and given the design incorporates the existing foot-print of the building, it should be viewed in positive sense. Internal refurb works would overcome issues of disuse of the structure that have led to areas of spot damp ingress in the main hall. The side single storey roof is also required to be updated prior to any use. The proposal would therefore, considering the positive repair improve the utility of the space and ensure internal comfort is optimised for visitors.³ The new proposed car-

² Based on report for local listing the main *architectural* significance of the building is confined to the front porch entrance and main front gable with flanking elements.

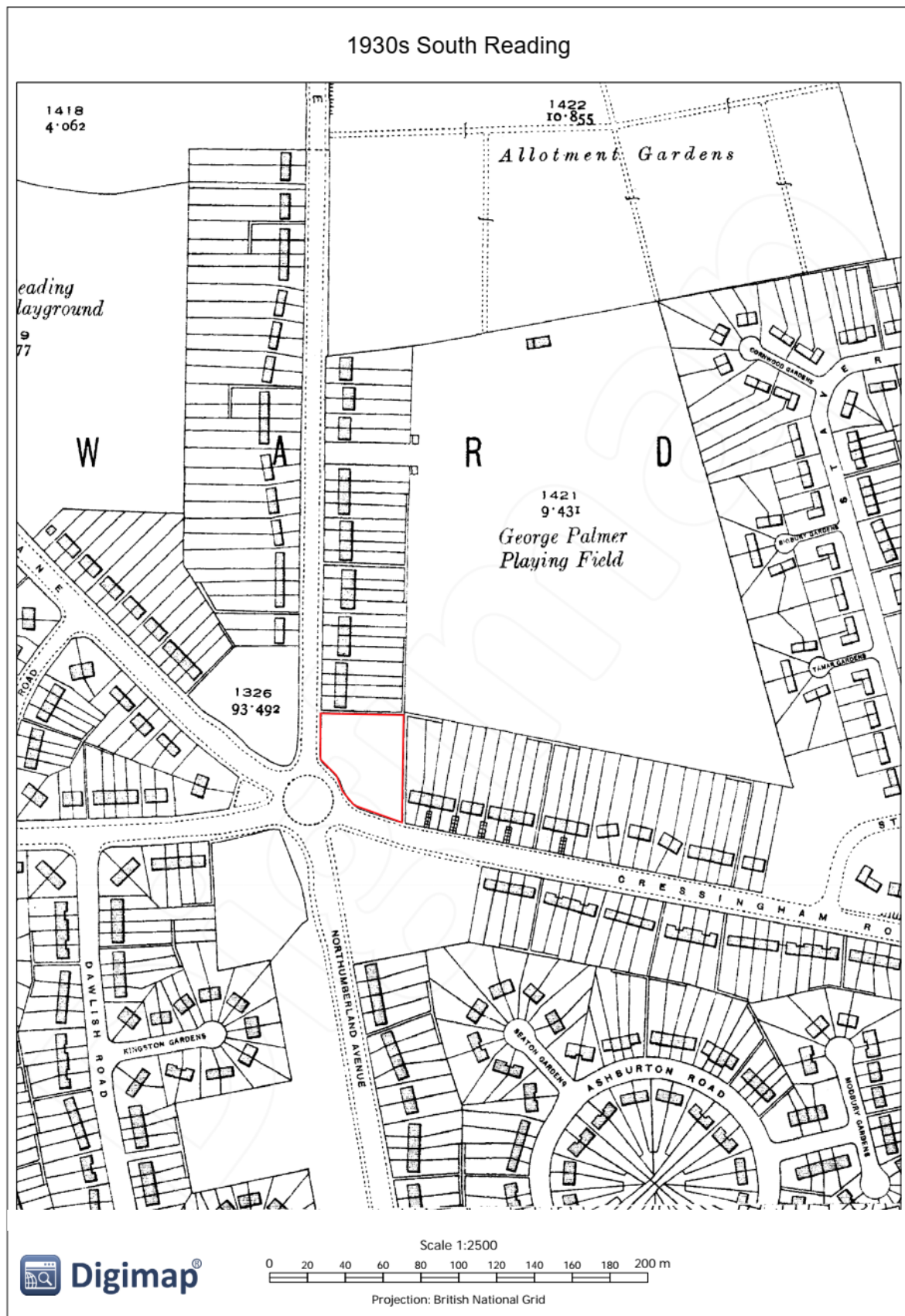
³ General advice is to be sought to overcome damp related issues and repair works are to be assessed however overall, the use of the site should be welcomed.

park will allow vehicles to enter onto the site from Cressingham road, some concern may be related to overcrowding of the site, however given the relatively small numbers of allocated parking this should not be a cause for concern. The addition of planting and soft-scaping in the car-park area would be an overall benefit and bolster the site to be in community use again.

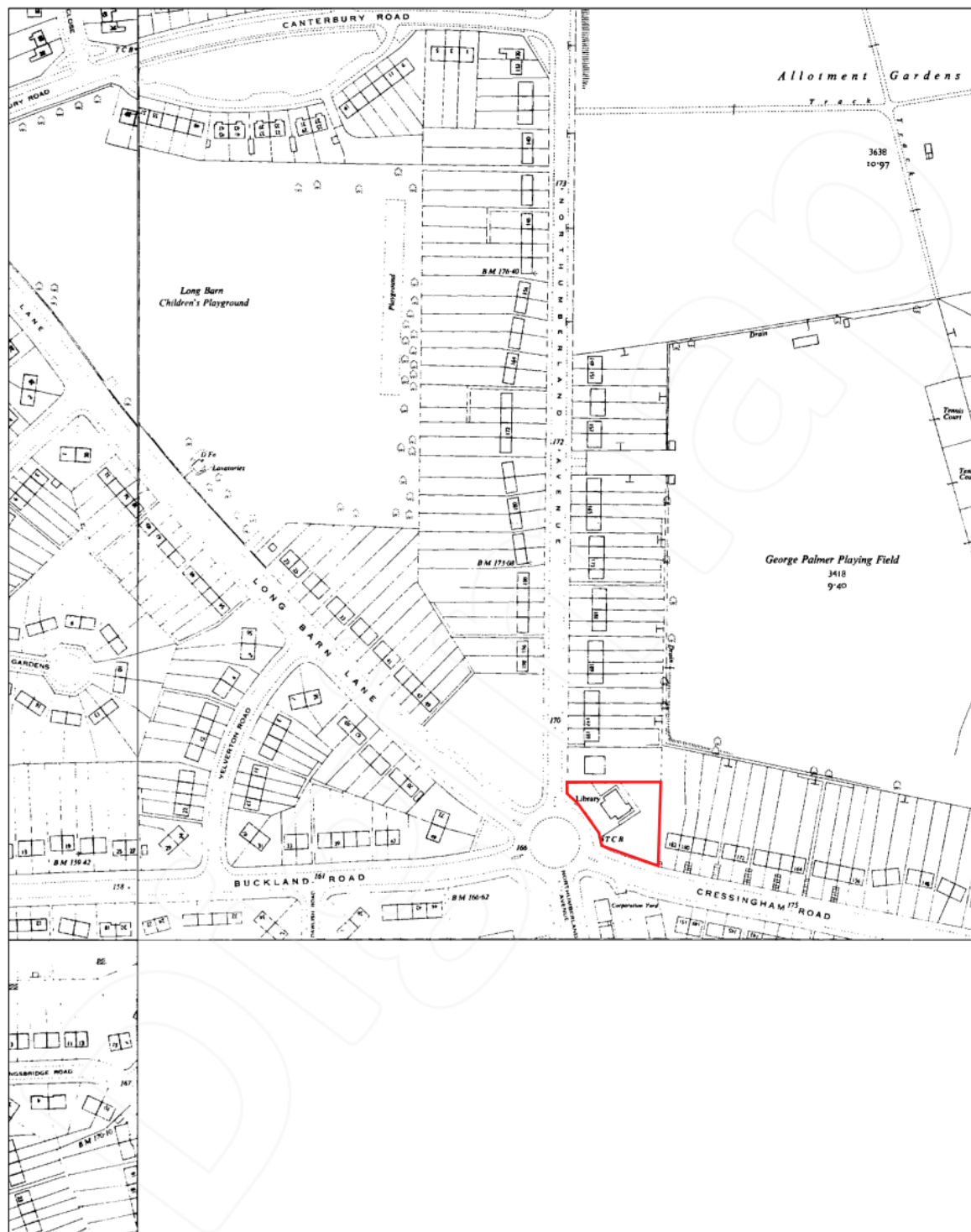
The *Social* importance (significance) of the site has been considered by the proposed use and new uses take into account the social history of the site. Given the positive impact of social drive for the proposed development, the proposed changes would benefit the site overall and give longevity to the Whitley library as a site of social benefit to the locality.

Mention must be made to the Second World War underground ARP post and/or air raid shelters at the rear of the site. These have not been investigated (lack of access), however given the type of proposal involving only surface alteration (no hard changes), it is deemed there will be no effect to these underground bunkers that are approximately twenty meters away from the proposed car parking site.

4.0 Historic Maps (site location marked in red)



1950s South Reading



5.0 Appendices



Fig 1:

Principal elevation of Whitley library observed from front of site, facing North-West.



Fig 2:

Prominence of historic library on roundabout junction between Long Barn Lane, Northumberland Avenue and Cressingham Road.

Fig 3:

Rear side of library showing previous single storey extended area with flat roof.



Fig 4:

Cast iron hopper outlet at west elevation front side.





Fig 5:

Rear elevation showing gable end with enclosed windows. See below image for internal view of windows.



Fig 6:

Windows internally had been replaced to PVC.