



163-165 Oxford Road,
Reading RG1 7UZ

HERITAGE STATEMENT

Client: SMILE

The Heritage Statement has been prepared to inform the proposals to convert the building from dental surgery to flatted accommodation. As it is a listed building it requires an assessment of the architectural and historical significance and a qualified appraisal of the design options and feasibility. The subsequent report contained below will support a formal statement for planning and justify the changes against design and policy criteria.



1st March 2021

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The report assesses the intention to convert the existing space of the building into flats, so as to maximise the use of the existing floor space in the building. This will subsequently support a planning application to be submitted to Reading Borough Council (RBC) to repair, restore and improve the space on the inside of 163-165 Oxford Road.

The objective is to respect the character of the building and its hierarchy whilst improving the space, so it is fit to be occupied by residential dwellings. The proposal to facilitate the improvement of internal spaces (through diligent intervention) and instate discrete changes to the layout of the building will see the accommodation retain its former importance as a House.

This report is intended to support applications for planning permission and listed building consent to be submitted to Reading Borough Council on behalf of Smile Group.

It is proposed to make internal changes to the building in the form of remodelling and refurbishment works to bring the space up to date with a new residential use.

As the building is listed, an understanding of its historic and architectural importance is essential for showing that the proposed changes will not harm any elements of the building deemed to be significant. This report describes the architectural and historical significance of the building before making an assessment of the impact of changes proposed to the interior, on the special interest of the listed building.

Reconciling development within the setting of Reading is an exercise that demands a level of understanding, observation and sensitivity. The starting point of such an analysis is in defining the qualities of the building and its relative significance. It is then possible to assess the degree to which the proposals will cause an impact on the historic and architectural character of the building.

The architectural and historic survey (3.1) gives an assessment of the internal parts of the building. It goes on to confirm that there have already been alterations to wall positions and changes of decorative order connected with the former use of the building by specialist clinical/ medical practitioners.

The current mode for interior decoration is neutral and the overwhelming character of the space is given by the tall ceilings (ground and first floors), large windows and polished floors. Only the decorative scheme given by the white walls from its last use forms a common theme which is present in the current material nature of the internal space.

Development which affects the special interest of a listed building or its setting requires listed building consent and planning permission. In the case of No 163 – 165, the building is listed as part of the early-mid C19 terrace, ranging from 149-169, Oxford Road. The necessary adjustments required for the previous commercial use of the listed building have led to internal design choices which have led to the loss of some original features. The proposal establishes an approach to restoring much of the architectural character of the building that has been lost in the last quarter of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century.

1.1 The Proposal

The proposals to make alterations require a Heritage appraisal to provide an assessment of the buildings architectural and historic character. The assessment identifies the constraints imposed by the listed interior of the building outlining its significance and describing elements that will need to be retained and worked around when configuring the new accommodation.

The building is over 3 storeys plus a basement level. It has a central staircase with corridors either side and as suiting the requirement of a surgery, there are waiting, reception and counselling rooms either side of the former fireplaces. The wall between no 163 and 165 has been opened up to allow movement between the spaces and it is likely that the orientation of the staircase has been changed from its former line.

The application is for the creation of improved living spaces within the confines of the existing walls, so as to maximise the use of the existing floor and wall positions. The overall objective is to utilise the space in the building befitting the dimensions of the current spaces. The character of the original building occupied by accommodation on the first and second floor has changed in the past and so the scope for making changes in the present should not compromise the historic or architectural quality of the structure.

The buildings circular plan sees a number of rooms already branching off the central corridors that spring from the central Hall. The bedrooms in the proposed will naturally utilise this linear shape.

The scheme will see blocked doors opened up and a new corridor created to facilitate more private access to the dental suite. On the upper floors the former dividing wall between no 163 and 165 will be filled in to create separation of the new flats.

The proposal to arrange the accommodation to four flats on the first and second floors and make improvements to the use of the rooms in the new spaces should appear reasonable, given that the layout is already present and does not require much reconfiguration.

Our assessment shows the existing fabric to be of a mixed age and of a fair condition in most places. In addition, as changes will improve rather than interfere with the four external walls of the building, then the linear plan form of the structure when first built will be retained. The proposed will retain primary load bearing walls and preserve the windows and external features which are original parts of this listed building. Whilst the existing open plan layout of the ground floor is being preserved and its current use as a surgery is maintained, the two floors above will have the former dividing wall between 163 and 165 reinstated.

The property is a Grade II listed building. For these reasons, the proposals that are assessed will ensure that any elements of historic or architectural interest within the property are retained, saving them for future generations, whilst making them fit for modern day living.

1.2 Methodology

The Heritage statement gives an approach to understanding the special interest and significance of the listed building. In keeping with NPPF the material considered in this review is proportionate to the listed status of no 163 – 165. As the building is located in the **Russell Street /Castle Hill Conservation Area** it is also important to recognise its importance as part of this designated area and the general townscape. The architectural and historic context of the site is covered in Section 2 of this report.

Section 3 goes on to assess the current status of the internal spaces with a view to judging the degree of importance it has on the listed building. The understanding of the status of the internal space and the layout of the rooms has informed the decision to undertake the changes made in this report.

It is important to identify any historic fittings or fixtures that should be preserved. Assessment of the internal spaces will isolate any original features such as finishes on woodwork, doors wall-panelling, cornice work, pictures rails and timber mouldings around windows and doors. Where these are evident and unified they would need to be isolated and treated with great sensitivity.

The statement provides justification for the changes to the layout. This will outline the rationale and method towards the new scheme, indicating that such changes can be introduced in a way that works within the existing historic fabric and is sensitive to the character of the historic building.

This report is based on information collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including local records and photographs. A collation of existing written and graphic information has been assessed in order to identify the character, extent, and significance of the known historic interest in the resource, including their local, regional or national significance as appropriate.

This assessment has relied upon:

- Site photographs from site visit taken in January 2021
- Various published evaluations of the history of Oxford Road:

The site visit provides evidence from which an assessment of the layout and fabric of the building can be made. This information helps towards determining its authenticity and the options going forward for improving the property. Also, the assessment of surviving historic fabric was carried out to identify the degree of heritage significance, and to ensure elements which have architectural value are retained in the scheme.

An audit of the building's interior (with photographic survey) was undertaken (Section 3.2) and a floor plan refers to the historic and architectural features to be retained as a result of the proposals. The external walls of the building are all original and will be retained or restored.

On the inside, initial observation shows that most of the walls are secondary walls, with the usual alterations brought to such a space through new stud partition walls to be seen in isolated places. It is a commitment from the client that in respect to the existing layout, there will be minimal change to the walls on the inside.

An assessment of the heritage asset is important in allowing the impact of the proposals on the use of the building to be fully understood. The Heritage Assessment in Section 4 of this report shows that where there is important internal historic fabric remaining in situ, it is being conserved. This follows the overriding principle of the proposals which has been to promote a 'conservation-led' approach to change at the building so as to provide interior space in keeping with modern living standards.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) have established the Government's planning policies for England and have introduced changes into the plan making system. At present the statutory development plan comprises a suite of saved policies from Reading Local Plan. With regard to heritage assets, the Council will require development to protect the heritage significance of listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments and sites of archaeological interest

The assessment will measure the potential impacts on the heritage asset and the statement will form a fundamental part of the planning applications, demonstrating to **Reading** that the scheme understands and responds to the sensitivities of the listed building.

1.3 Policy Considerations

National:

The legislation relating to the historic environment is contained in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16 and 66 of the Act are of particular relevance to this case, because they place a duty on the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the special interest and setting of a listed building. Section 72 imposes a similar duty in respect to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

Consideration has been given to the following national and local planning policy and guidance relating to the historic built environment:

- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 – the legislation which provides for the designation and protection of listed buildings and their settings and Conservation Areas.
- National planning policy framework, July 2018 (NPPF), in particular, chapter 16.
- Publications by English Heritage, notably Conservation Principles 2008, which sets out guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment.
- The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal (2020)

The NPPF builds on a history of legislation and guidance requiring local planning authorities to identify areas of 'special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' and then to pay 'special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of those areas'. Heritage assets are the central all-encompassing tenant of the conservation strategy.

Mapping and assessment in Section 2 demonstrate how the past has shaped the present landscape and it provides the evidence base required for plan making. It shows the development of the history, fabric and character of this part of Reading with an understanding of its origins, how and why it has changed over time. This information helps understand the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset so as to avoid conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal (190, NPPF).

In accordance with **paragraph 189** of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the document will provide sufficient information about the heritage significance of the building and its contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area to determine the application. Furthermore, it assists the local authority's duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings and of preserving the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Local Plan

The new Reading Borough Local Plan was adopted on 4th November 2019, setting out planning policies for development in Reading up to 2036.

Policy EN1 (Protection and enhancement of the historic environment) states that 'all proposals will be expected to protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings, the historic character and local distinctiveness of the area in which they are located. Proposals should seek to avoid harm in the first instance. Any harm to or loss of a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, usually in the form of public benefits.

Policy EN6 (New development in a historic context) states that 'in areas characterised by heritage assets, the historic environment will inform and shape new development. New development will make a contribution to the historic character of the area by respecting and enhancing its architectural and visual qualities and considering how heritage considerations can influence the design of new development.

The conservation of features and elements that contribute to the heritage asset's significance and character are important. This may include chimneys, windows and doors, boundary treatments and original roof coverings.

2.0 163 – 165 OXFORD ROAD AND ITS HISTORIC CONTEXT

2.1 History of Reading

Early

The Conservation Area is defined by the ancient route from London to the west (now Bath Road) and by a route from points south to Oxford, which was called Pangbourne Road (now Oxford Road). The roads intersected near the site of St Mary's Minster.

The eastern part of the Conservation Area between what is now Oxford Road and the southern end of Coley Hill was on the edge of Reading and was occupied in the 1540s, but most of the land was open country.

Reading changed hands several times during the Civil War but at the end of 1642 was garrisoned by Royalist troops. The siege of Reading took place in April 1643 with Parliamentary forces under the Earl of Essex first setting up a position facing the Forlorn'd Hope (at the top of Castle Hill) and Fort Royal (between Castle Hill and Castle Crescent), the major Royalist defensive positions on the west of Reading.

Georgian Period 1714-1837

Changes were seen in this period to the movement and access roads around the town. The Bath Road between Reading and Puntfield was turnpiked by an Act of Parliament in 1715. A toll gate was erected at the top of Castle Hill on the western outskirts of the town, immediately to the east of the drive to the estate of Coley House.

From the mid-18th century onwards, Reading's location meant it became an increasingly important coaching and wagon stop between Bath and London. Arms Inn and public houses such as the Horse and Jockey rebuilt in 1823 on the site of the 17th century inn, flourished in the west out of town.

John Rocque's map of 1761 shows plots on the north side of what is now Castle Hill. Although most of those buildings were subsequently demolished or redeveloped, no's 154-160 Castle Hill is one significant building which remains.

At the beginning of the 19th century a succession of large properties for the wealthier families of Reading were built along the two main roads from the centre. During the century, the land between the roads, which had been market gardens and nurseries, was also developed with a range of properties to house wealthy businessmen, artisans and labourers.

A thriving market gardening business developed in the area to the south of the present-day Castle Hill and Tilehurst Road area. Swallows' Nurseries was run by James Swallow with his son William Pratt Swallow. They are known to have supplied plants and shrubs to various local estates, most notably, in the mid 1790's, to Purley Park which at that time was being landscaped by Humphry Repton. Another plant nursery was located just north of the Oxford Road located between the railway and Mason Street and shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map .

The surveyor William Swallow sold large parts of his nurseries in the 1920's for private housing, marking the beginning of rapid change. Mr Swallow 'founded' Prospect Street and Russell Street, the first two early connector routes from the Oxford Road in the north to the Bath Road and Pigs Green Lane routes to the south. Russell Street was laid out along the eastern boundary of former nursery garden plots.

These two streets were integral in setting out the grid system for the development of the rest of the streets in the area throughout the 19th century. Along Oxford Road there was a similar pattern of development, spreading from the town centre to Argyle Street in the west. Georgian houses and terraces line the route and several long terraces date to the early 19th century. Along the Oxford Road many of the 2-storey properties, with ground floor shops and residential accommodation above, were built by 1833.

Victorian Development

The railway reached Reading in 1840 and the line through Reading West station was opened in 1847 but the station itself did not open until 1906. The railway and the bridge were placed at a distance from the edge of town which was near Prospect Street. The railway bridge divides the eastern end of the Oxford Road where the properties are a mix of Georgian and Victorian building from the more commercial, largely late Victorian and Edwardian shops further to the west.

The bridge, while not the original brick bridge, is a reminder of the industry that arrived to Reading in the mid-19th century and the associated success it brought along with it.

At this time, larger estates began to be sold off, for the establishment of housing for Reading's rapidly increasing population. There was a movement westward from the town for the development of much needed housing for the many people now working in local industries.

As the population increased, further places of worship were built for the community and Those, including the Providence Chapel on Oxford Road (c.1859). Towards the end of the century, Bridge Hall was built near the railway bridge for Reading's Open Brethren group. The Grade II Reading Synagogue (1900), in Goldsmid Road is of Moorish design and is the only purpose-built synagogue in Berkshire.

Twentieth and Twenty-first century development

The Jesse family's contribution to the development of Victorian housing in Reading was Considerable and they figured most notably in the development of the Conservation Area. By the beginning of the 20th century most of the development of housing in the Conservation Area had been completed.

The Pavilion, once a well-attended cinema which opened in 1929 is now home to the Lifespring Church since 2013 who have restored much of the original cinema's interior detailing. The Carey Centre and the Salvation Army citadel are on the site of an older terrace of houses facing east into an area called Pine Court, poor quality housing for local factory workers at the nearby Coach Manufactory.

The latter half of the 20th century saw some buildings constructed which are not in keeping with the rest of the Conservation Area while others (Castle Gate) fit well with their surroundings and are modern assets to the area.

The modern Berkshire Record Office (2000) was built on the site of the riding school using modern materials and a design that strikes the right balance on the site. The new build at 179 Oxford Road combined elements of the two older buildings on the site and in turn, subtly enhanced the immediate street scene.

Later 20th century and current developments have responded to Reading's housing demand with the conversion of many of the larger family homes that had been built in the area to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Regrettably, though, there are a few buildings along the north side of Oxford Road and the occasional modern build on streets south of Castle Hill and scattered throughout the area that have impacted negatively on their settings.

The Inner Distribution Road (IDR) which was constructed through the eastern end of the Conservation Area in the late 1960s had a significant impact on the character of the area, severing the neighbourhood's direct access from the town centre. The east side of Howard Street was demolished and it also divided Castle Street and Castle Hill in two at the roundabout, thus losing the context of the long road to Bath and the west that went through the town centre at St. Mary's Butts.

Significant buildings on Castle Street were lost as well as some substantially older properties to the east of Howard Street and Body Road.

In 1974 the Conservation Area was created, in recognition that the residential neighbourhood to the west of the IDR held a varied and special collection of Reading's range of housing from the 18th to the 20th century.

The 20th and 21st centuries has seen detractions to the character of the area as single-family houses have been progressively adapted to multiple occupation residences. This has resulted in or exacerbated: unsympathetic alterations; pressures on traffic and parking; unsightly bin storage; satellite dishes and social problems. These factors have somewhat affected the appetite for sympathetic investment in the area.

2.2 Development at No 163 - 165

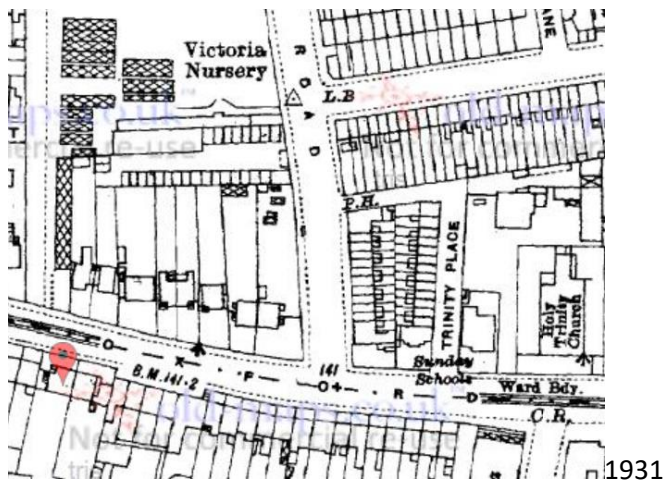
The earliest maps (1879) shows the street in which the subject site sits.

IN 1879 the well-developed edges of Oxford Road are seen as comprising the long terraces on the south side in contrast with the more civic buildings of the church and the schools. Individual detached villas are seen on the west side of Bedford Road at the junction with Oxford Road. The built form remains unchanged well into the middle of the 20th century.

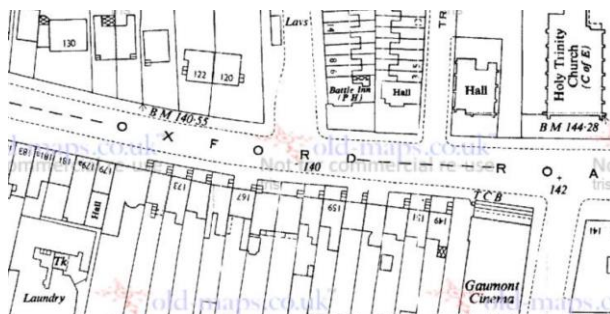
In 1931, The presence of Victoria Nursery on the north side of Oxford Road demonstrates the growing trend for market gardening and the Inter War pressures for private gardens. The Gaumont Cinema is another addition to the built fabric of this section of Oxford Road, illustrating the importance of cinema in the community.



1879



1931



1959

2.3 Listed Building Designation

Nos 149 to 169 (odd) was listed on 14 December 1978:

Early-mid C19 terrace. 2 storeys and basement. Nos 163 and 165 form a 3 storey feature opposite Bedford Road. Red brick with 2 course grey brick band over basement. Stucco cornice and blocking course. Slate roof with brick ridge chimneys. 2 windows each, glazing bar sashes except Nos 149, 151 and 157. Arched doorways with slight recess, panelled doors (mostly 1/2 glazed, some 6 panel), decorated fanlights except Nos 149 and 151 (plain). Nos 155 and 157 have modern shopfronts. No 167 has basement shopfront. Nos 163 and 165 have hipped roof over centre 4 bays, flat eaves and off ridge chimneys, 2 storey recessed end bays with parapet, cornice and blocking course, arched doorways below 1st floor cill band. Ground floor windows round headed. Thin railings before on dwarf walls with wrought iron patterned standards and gates.

No's 163 - 165 is inside the Conservation Area and so changes to the external parts of the building would be permissible yet carefully controlled. The effect of the listing is that no change can be made to the building given in the description, including structural changes both inside or outside, without consent.

2.4 Conservation area context

The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area was last appraised in 2004. A later appraisal in 2020 acknowledged that the Conservation Area was placed on Historic England's listing of "Heritage at Risk" at the end of 2018. As well as providing detail on the historic and architectural interest of the Conservation Area, it highlights those issues that have resulted in this designation and which accordingly need to be managed.

Boundary's

The Oxford Road character area was enlarged to include the subject site in the recent boundary review of 2020. The new area includes 78 to 104A,104, Holy Trinity Church,120-190 Oxford Road (evens) on the north side from Alfred Street to the railway bridge and the inclusion of 205 to 283 Oxford Road (odds) on the south side of the Oxford Road from Prospect Street to the railway bridge. The inclusion of 1 to 23 Prospect Street (odds) and 2 to14 (evens) Prospect Street.

This extension expanded the 2004 boundary that runs down the centre of the road between the IDR and Prospect Street. The extension includes all properties fronting Oxford Road along the south between the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) and the Reading West railway bridge and a majority of sites along the north side of that road although most of the modern sites are excluded.

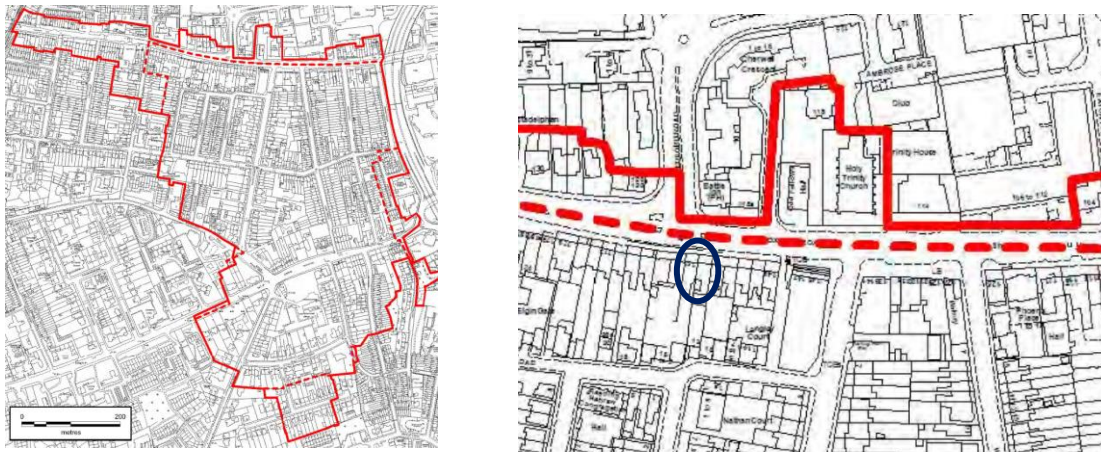


Figure 1: Conservation Area boundary

General

Castle Hill and Oxford Road are historic radial routes from the town centre, and a scattering of buildings developed along them from the 18th century, some of which survive as important elements in the Conservation Area.

The area between them was largely open until the early 19th century, when Russell St and Prospect St were developed as suburbs of mostly large, terraced properties, to be followed by the development of remaining areas as terraced housing. These areas, with sections of plain and polychrome brickwork give the Conservation Area its essential.

The Conservation Area is notable for its diverse and representative collection of urban, domestic English architectural styles dating from the Georgian period through the Victorian and Edwardian periods with modest amounts of later 20th century infill. With its range of wealthy to more modest examples of each of these periods, the Conservation Area forms a microcosm of Reading's residential building during these periods.

The Conservation Area illustrates the emergence of a street pattern as the agricultural lands bordering Castle Hill and the Oxford Road to the west of the mediaeval town centre of Reading were progressively developed: first, as an elegant suburb for members of the town's elite and later with infill streets of terraced housing for employees of Reading's new manufacturing industries whose rapid growth was enhanced by the arrival of the railway.

Reading's proud heritage of brick, tile and terracotta manufacturing is exemplified in each of five separately distinctive character areas of which Oxford Road is one.

Oxford Road Character Area

Oxford Road is a half- mile long "regular mix" of Georgian terraced housing and Victorian retail frontages. The high value of Oxford Road to Reading's history is given by the large proportion of the properties were built prior to 1833: the route contains 40 listed properties.

Oxford Road is one of the two major routes to the west out of the town centre, from which the infill residential streets of the area were developed. The special and varied early to mid-19th century character of the Oxford Road extends clear to the railway bridge. This area has an evidential mix of Georgian and Victorian built environment, noting that the Oxford Road to the west of the bridge is entirely devoid of Georgian built structure.

Significance

The Oxford Road is one of the earliest roads leading out of Reading, south of the River Thames, serving as the primary route to Pangbourne and on to Oxford. The character area consists of the Oxford Road corridor between the IDR to the east and the Reading West Railway Bridge at its western end. This is a vibrant area with an active pedestrian and traffic route, well known for independent shops which reflect the area's diverse communities.

Architectural character

The 2-and 3-storey streetscape is a mix of impressive Georgian terraces and stand-alone houses interspersed with Victorian shops and houses along the route. The oldest buildings date to the early 19th century, in several long, listed terraces notably at: 149-177, 187-193, 195-197 and 197-203 Oxford Road and Prospect Terrace at 237-247 Oxford Road/ no. 2 Lorne Street.

Although there is much general neglect of retail frontages and poorly-maintained, terraced houses, the area's early history is still strongly evident in its 19th century built environment. Solid Arts and Crafts influences are apparent in the many attractive polychrome brick and terracotta façades in the area. The Oxford Road Community School, and houses along the west side of Prospect Street display good terra-cotta embellishment. The first-floor levels above the shops and the residences opposite the retail terrace at the junction with Argyle Road are notable for their colourful polychrome brickwork.

Further along the northern side of Oxford Road at the western end, the long terrace of c.1890 shops with residences above at nos. 152 to 180 has a vibrant, polychrome façade which largely retains its integrity and is unpainted. This terrace exhibits a high level of detail and is in better condition than other retail terraces further to the west beyond the railway bridge. Original bargeboards above centre dormers and polychromed chimneys largely remain.

To the south opposite the retail terrace are two polychromed residential terraces at nos. 249-253 and nos. 255-261, c.1890, flanking the entrance to Argyle Street. The properties directly behind those on Argyle Street reflect this continued style of building onto the Oxford Road streetscape and the ghost signage of an old tailoring business (H Jackson Tailor) at 2 Argyle Street adds clear historical context to the area.

Early 19th century mapping evidence suggests that shops with residential accommodation above them extended westward from the town centre; notably between Alfred Street and Eaton Place and also between Russell Street and Waylen Street.

The nature of these shops and services has altered over time, reflective of incoming immigrant populations. The parish church of the Holy Trinity, along with Bridge Hall, Providence Chapel and the modern Lifespring Church are evidence of the conservation area's historical association with a variety of religious institutions.

Detractions to the CA

Most of the early residential terraces are in poor to moderate condition, with several converted to shops at ground floor level. The Georgian terraces are largely of red brick, except for the impressive stuccoed villas at nos. 197-203. Fortunately, a majority of the listed terraces still retain original windows, doors and detailing although there are some exceptions where enforcement has failed to catch uPVC replacement window in the listed terraces.

At nos. 152 to 180, the animated retail signs above modern altered retail frontages are a moderate detraction, but they also display the many diverse and long-standing local businesses that the Oxford Road is well-known for. Many of the windows on the first floor have been converted to uPVC, and retail frontages blur an original storefront layout.

The terrace at nos. 225-235 is a simple two-and half storey red brick terrace with ample, deep-set gardens. The two more exuberant Arts and Crafts influenced poly-chrome houses at the eastern end of the terrace at nos. 221-223 have front gardens converted to hard standing and the loss of a red brick front wall that detracts from the rest of the terrace.

Regrettably, a combination of modern ad-hoc alterations with the poorly maintained public realm along the road strikes a distracting discordance. Many modern alterations are out of keeping with the historic environment. Some modern builds have failed to respect the Conservation Area's character. Much of the residential accommodation, including above the shops, tends to be poorly maintained. The conflict of modern and historic materials and poor maintenance has led to a general erosion of the street's historic character.

This is compounded by ad-hoc renovations, illuminated signage and the neglect of the building façades by individual owners have largely caused worsening condition on many buildings on the north and south side of Oxford Road between Howard Street and Russell Street.

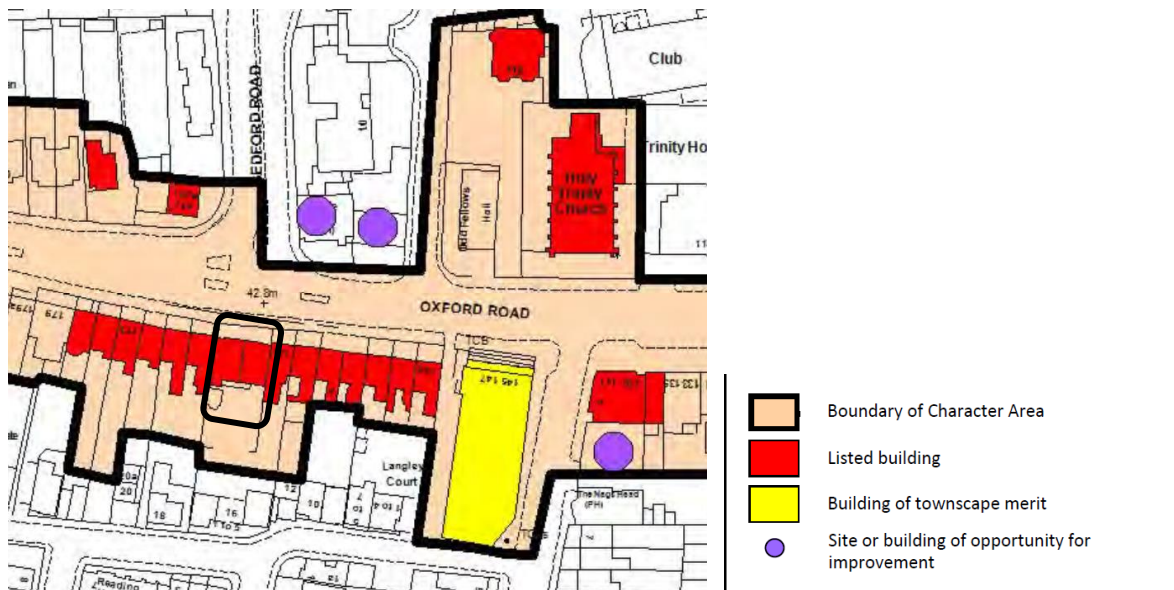


Figure 2: Townscape Assessment: Oxford Road Character Area



152 to 180



187 – 193

Key Positive Characteristics of the Oxford Road Character Area

- The listed Georgian terraces of **149-177**, 187-193, 195-197, 197-203 and Prospect Terrace at 2 Lorne Street/237-247 Oxford Road, though many of these properties are in poor condition.
- The early Georgian single-family residences at 101 and 104 Oxford Road
- Oxford Road Community School, which is well-maintained
- Holy Trinity Church with its sealed catacombs beneath and its Pugin chancel screen
- Bridge Hall, which is currently housing a church although in a state of poor repair
- Providence Chapel with its polychrome brick façade
- The Pavilion, a well-restored former cinema, now home to the Lifespring Church
- The impressive Gothic Revival villa at 118, set back from the road
- The unpainted polychrome terrace of shops at 152 to 180, east of Gower Street
- The twinned polychrome terraces at 249-253 and 255-261 either side of Argyle Street opposite the shops
- The rare artisan terrace at 1-9 Prospect Street
- Prospect Mews, its small stand of terraces and retained stone entrance way
- Recently repainted cast iron bollards and new tree plantings along the route
- Greyed brick end first floor at 109B Oxford Road facing the intersection with Zinzan Street.

3.0 ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY of 163-165

Form & significance of the building

No 163-165 is an early-mid C19 terrace over 2 storeys plus basement. It is in red brick with a 2 course grey brick band over basement. It has a slate roof with brick ridge chimneys, with 2 windows to each building comprising glazing bar sashes. It is distinguished by arched doorways, hipped roof over centre, round headed Ground floor windows and thin railings on dwarf walls.

Oxford Road's character is gained from the length of the road and the general plainness and uniformity of the Georgian houses.

The building has Georgian proportions and qualities with the brick middle and upper storeys balanced well with the roof and the decorative street front. It is possible to read the former residential character of the ground and first storeys, with full-sized sash windows set on stuccoed sills. The basement and ground floor is in contrast, as smaller windows emphasise the former service use of the space at these levels.

The last occupation of no 163-165 is noted by the former use of the space as a dental surgery. The basement has limited original internal features evident to the building. The ground and first floor levels of the building have items of architectural and historic interest, especially to the historic front and rear principal rooms with some original features evident on the ground floor at this level of the building.

Internally, the ground and first floor storeys of the building have been used for medical consulting rooms with alterations undertaken over a period of time to accommodate tenant's requirements which include cabinetry and other fittings to suit a dental surgery. The space at basement is given over to plant and storage with some living area also present.

The ground floor has two consulting rooms, a waiting room and a reception. On the first floor three rooms are given over to medical purposes with a waiting room and two consulting rooms. An additional Living Room connects with the use of the second floor where there is a bedroom, as well as two storage rooms and an office. The current use of the upper floors is for staff and administration.

The first and second floor of the building provide a one bedroom self-contained flat which was last upgraded in the late 1970s/early 1980s. The distribution of condensing pipework within the flat accommodation was designed to be installed in ceiling voids so as to ensure there was no disruption/intrusion to the main fabric of the building. Additional cabling and boxing of services is seen throughout the building and is a feature of unsuitable additions that have been 'slapped' onto the building by later tenants.

The first and second floors are accessed by stairs in the central axis of the building which runs across in an east west direction. At no 165 the stairs are reached by the well-appointed entrance hall/ corridor on the ground floor. Former spaces are arranged either side of the landing that encloses the staircase on both sides at no 163 and 165. Equally sized rooms are formed at the front and rear of each building, with the retained fireplace at the front and rear marking the separation between the two buildings.

3.1 General Layout and Plan (Refer to Figure 2)

The existing plans relate to the general dimensions and proportions of the original building that are seen according to surviving masonry walls on all sides of the structure. Together with the adjoining terrace group of Grade II listed buildings the property is an important part of the historic character and appearance of Oxford Road.

Nos 163 – 165 has seen much modification to internal fabric and additions, with the opening out of the space on the ground floor being most apparent.

The Reception Room and Waiting Room at the front of the ground floor occupy the same width of space either side of the fireplace. The space of these front rooms is exactly replicated in the two rear rooms occupied by Consulting Areas. The front space is characterised by a covered-in fireplace with chimney stack and a pair of large sash windows which faces Oxford Road. One side of the fireplace is open, allowing for movement from reception to waiting room, whilst the other side has a door which gives a more formal connection between the two spaces.

It is clear from the surviving primary fabric of the building on the east, west, south and north sides that the principal spaces followed the usual layout of a private building, of a central landing with rooms to the sides. The movement appears to be characterised by a combination of return stairs and their logical movement on the vertical plane at the centre of the building. In the landing between the front and rear rooms, two sets of staircases provide movement up the building to the first and second floor.

There is a physical record of changes being made to the floorplan, as seen through the location of openings in walls where alterations have taken place. In the area to the sides of the fireplaces, changes have occurred that relate to the core of the building, as sections of wall have been dismantled so as to accommodate a wider space on the ground floor. It is not known when the walls were opened up, but it is likely to be consistent with the former occupation by a dental practise and other commercial tenants.

A section of wall has been taken out in one place on the first floor, where an opening is noted on the near side of the fireplace so as to facilitate movement along a corridor to the second consulting room. On the 2nd floor an opening is noted in the rear space and a door now occupies the space to link one store room to the other. On the front space of the second floor, one side of the fireplace is occupied by a built in cupboard and on the other side, facing Oxford Road, there is a blocked in door.

The ground floor corridor is enclosed by internal walls, whilst the entrance hall to both 163 and 165 are enclosed by the party walls of 161 and 167 respectively. This is an important part of the original buildings defining character and one which is preserved in the existing. On the first floor above however, the inner wall has been dismantled in order to increase the space of the current Living Room. It is useful to compare this wall with the opposite wall at no 163 which is left in part and has blocked doors. This arrangement suggests that formerly the open wall to the side of no 165 was built up and had doors which gave access to the kitchen.

It is a common design in Georgian building for a staircase to be contrived on two different movements, and its location taking on a return flight to serve different floor levels of the building would appear commensurate. It was typical for a stair built by hand in the early 19th century to incorporate two or three short, straight runs linked by turning stairs or a small landing.

Staircases in high-ceilinged buildings would also make use of the dogleg, where a straight stair bends sharply up from the landing into the next flight at a 180-degree angle.

Internally, the space is given over to twelve uniformly sized rooms arranged around a central landing. The ground and first floor is the premium space as the rooms occupy the full width and height of the building. All of the rooms are independent and reached to by a separate door from the central access core of the landing and staircase.

The rooms on either side of the landing relate to the spine wall of the building and they follow the existing line of the original walls from the basement up.

The evidence of symmetrical organisation of the rooms is seen in the current plan. As the Reception Room and Waiting Room had been previously divided across its middle, as were the Consulting Rooms to the rear and the Waiting and Living Area on the first floor above. In the rear space on the first floor the only difference to the pattern of division is the creation of a partition wall to create an internal corridor to serve access into the second Consulting room

The basement is still very much arranged in its earlier format and change has been limited to boxing for cabling and services. The central dividing wall between the two buildings is still in place with the exception of one small opening in the wall in the front room. This allows for the movement between no 163 and 165 from the single stair which is in no 165

The ground floor is largely open and revolves around the two wide spaces either side of the staircase, effectively forming the enlarged front room and rear room. The circular plan sees the rooms branching off the central corridor. In its last use these rooms were used as waiting, reception and counselling areas.

The ground floor space is characterised by the Entrance Hall/ corridors to the sides on 163 and 165 respectively. The corridor extends two thirds of the depth of the space before leading into an ancillary room (163) and into the rear wing extension (165). These flank spaces are very much a part of the circulation pattern in the building.

In the **first and second floor**, the spaces have been divided in much the same way as the first floor, with four interdependent rooms feeding from the hallway of no 165 on one side and 163 on the other side. There is however one major difference between the upper floors and the ground floor, as the former do not have entire unimpeded 360 degree movement around the circular motion. Rather, there are incidences where the wall between 165 and 163 is retained, making some spaces more enclosed and exclusive. This is seen for example in the front rooms on the first floor, where the spaces are divided as per the original format of the building.

Features and Fittings

Many of the original architectural finishes are likely to have been removed in last remodelling of the internal spaces, in the 1980's. The overall standard of refurbishment from this time is generally dated and not of a particularly high standard in terms of contemporary specification. Although habitable and in generally reasonable condition, presentation is of an ordinary standard.

The staircase is often the most interesting architectural element to be found on a building's interior. The detailing of the treads and newel posts are a feature of its historic character, yet elements such as the spindles and the baluster appear to be perfectly formed and machine cut to fit the space in which it sits. Although the staircase contributes to the original decorative scheme of the building it has been altered in the late 20th century.

The volume in which the staircase relates is of importance as it signifies the hierarchy of space as distributed throughout the building. The vertical movement of the staircase area is significant in understanding former access through the building. Whilst the wooden baluster and the turns taken in the flight on each landing are interesting period features, the structural supports that weave the unit together are clearly modern additions that denude its character.

In the likely chance the building was occupied by a family on the first floor with servants living in the basement, the rooms are rated according to their size and outward perspective. In this respect the front rooms have a generous view onto Oxford Road the rooms to the rear had windows for taking views of the former gardens. The current rooms refer closely to the well-appointed and spacious accommodation used by private families in its earlier years.

The rooms are of a similar size thus suggesting there was a basic hierarchy in terms of views for residents. Still the main rooms were likely to be the two front rooms on the first floor as they have the largest windows which suggests a higher status.

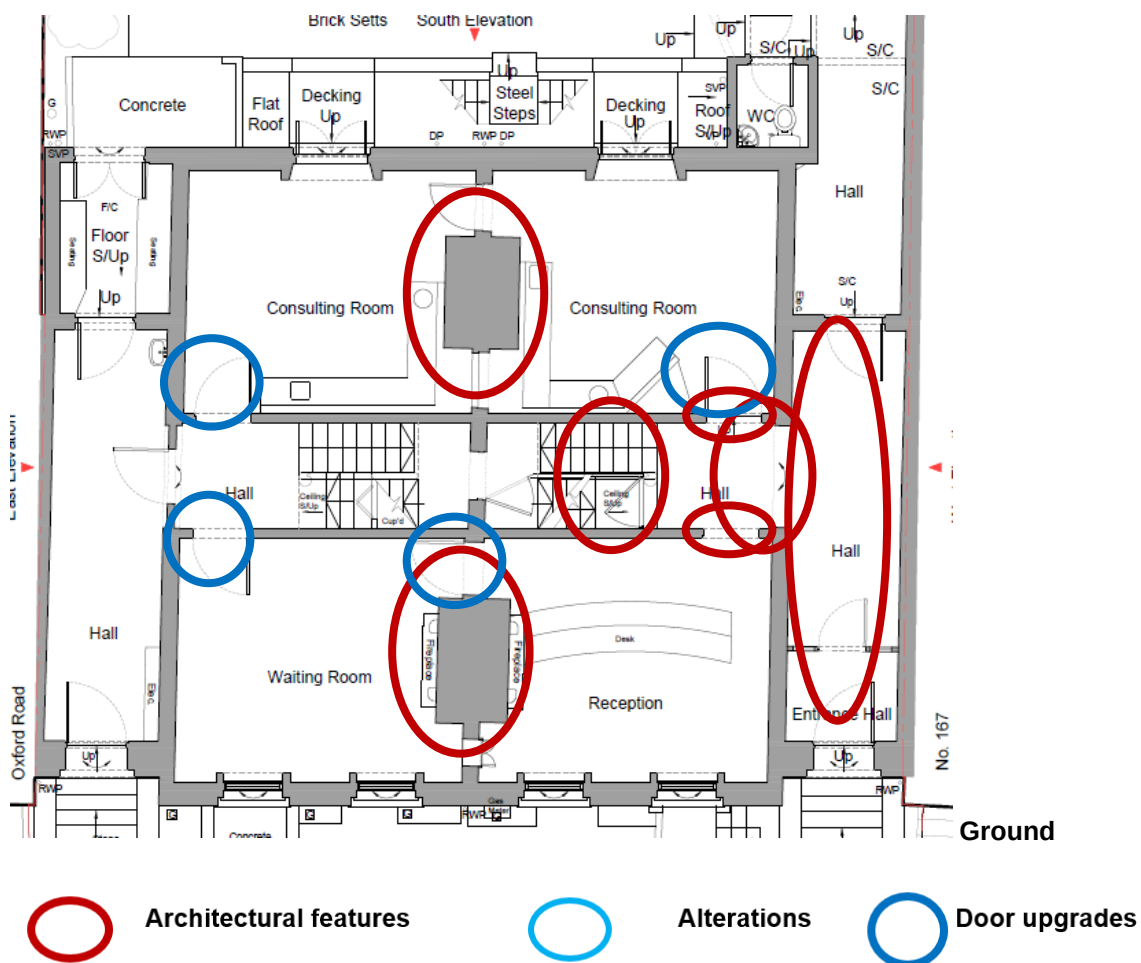
The well distributed chimneys to the front and rear side walls of the former dividing walls between 163 and 165 suggest heating was routed to all parts of the property. The well sized windows provide signs to the apparent status of the residents and guests the building attracted.

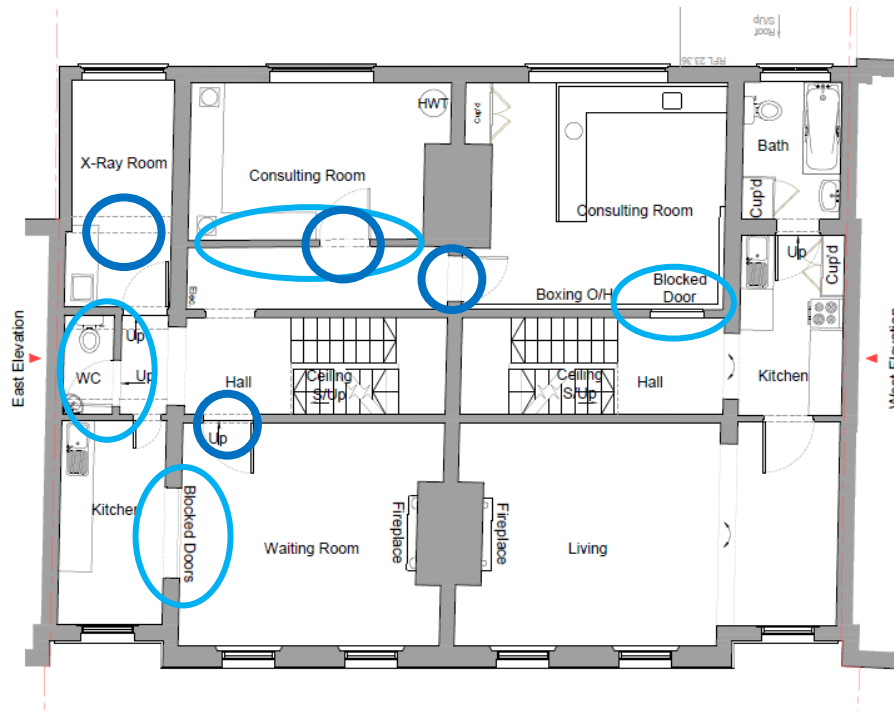
There are seven early fireplaces, all of which apart from two (basement and first floor) have been blocked out and left as outlines. The relating chimney stacks are visible from outside; as the chimneys are seen as having a roof outlet so the logical movement of this element in the structure can be read. It is meaningful that the chimney breast as seen in the retained part of 163 and 165 as a continuous piece of building and an example of the building's construction.

The walls of the landing have simple decoration given by a low dado rail and it is only the skirting that runs down the side of the staircase to ground floor. The arch to the entrance hall is a period feature and although it is not known if it was contemporary with the original building, it has some integrity.

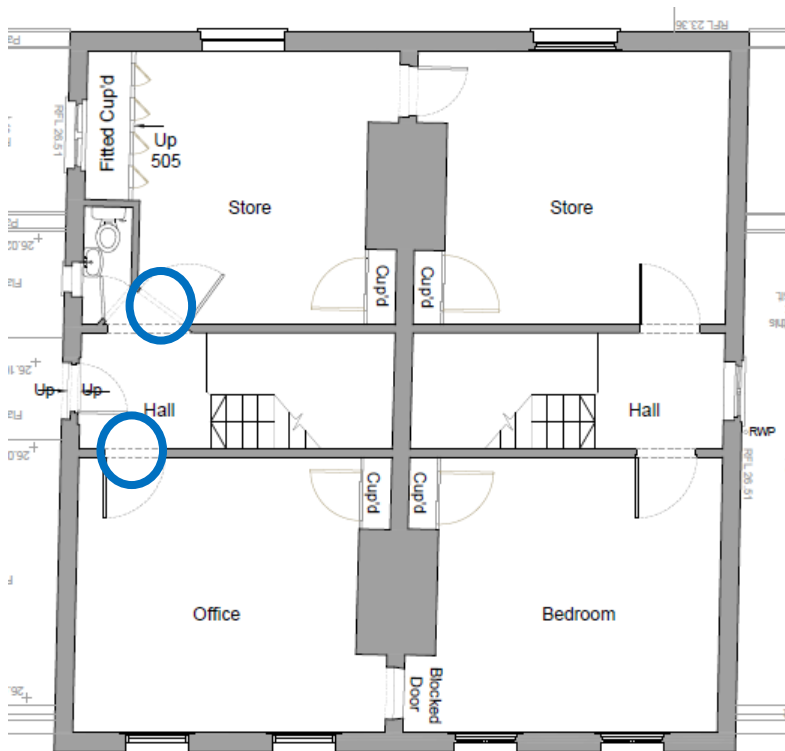
The dividing primary walls have been taken out, and it appears that the openings have been changed. Although the original party wall between 163 and 165 was built thick to help carry the weight of chimney stack, this has been taken down in part.

Figure 3: Existing plans with features marked





First Floor



Second floor



Architectural features



Alterations



Door upgrades

3.2 Internal Survey:

Basement: Refer to photos 1-10

In the basement the landing leads to separate rooms. The stair has a dog leg and leaves a storage space under the run of steps . A four panelled door is seen in one position and the opening in which it is located is an ordinary square frame with period mouldings. The skirting board to the stair is also ordinary and ledges have been inserted to the side of the wall .

At the top of the basement stairs the spindles and balusters are simple and appear to be from the 1980's. At the bottom and top of the basement stairs there is a plethora of routing and boxing to the sides of the stair and making the introduction to the doorway untidy. The basement has been mainly put over to storage and services and there is a mix of pipes, tile inlays and wooden panels inserted to create cupboards, shelving or divisions in the space. The original fireplace is retained and an internal glazed window reflects the location of such an opening within the basement area.

Amongst the cornucopia of plaster, tile and boarding that has been applied to the walls, there is a section of old brick, painted white. Within this wall there is a brick arch , which represents the former use of this space for keeping coal and one which would have been used by the waiting classes in the Victorian times. Latterly a wooden lintel has been inserted within this arch.

The height in the basement is generally low with ceilings underlain by some old looking timber beams. There are no decorative effects and the only attempt at architectural character is seen in the imitation architrave and timber beams . The doors are designed for fire and security reasons which tends to detract from any character former doors may have had. There is one door with a period architrave that illustrates former style.

Ground Floor at 165: Refer to photos 11-14

The ground floor is marked by the meeting of the corridor with the landing to the stairs. The corridor is a grand space, with a glass screen forming the inner lobby to the front door. The dado rail, cornicing and skirting board all appear to be consistent and have a coherent decorative effect.

The area at the bottom of the first floor stairs is of interest for the skirting, doors and dado rail. One surviving feature of architectural interest is the swirl on the newel post at the bottom of the stair (12). At the top of the door the glazed opening is of historic interest which ties in with the more ornamental elements on the main ground to first floor staircase, which has dado rail and well-appointed skirting (13). Architraves on the door appear to be original.

The status of the landing, which is in the centre of the internal space, is enhanced by the grand looking staircase.

On the other side of landing is an interesting *arch feature* (14) which crosses the width of the space between the walls that lead into the corridor. There is decorative panelling beneath this arch. The corridor itself has skirting and a low dado rail whose status is perhaps lower than the dado seen in the main parts of the building. On the first floor directly above this point there is another arch feature which does not have the same character and is clearly a later artistic intervention trying to replicate what is below.

At no 163: Refer to photos 15-21

There are a variety of doors from four panel with windows, six panel lights and a fully glazed panelled lights. At this point the architrave is not moulded and the skirting is different on either side of the opening, suggesting that the whole door unit is a later addition.

The staircase at 163 is elaborate in the run from ground to first floor, as the balusters are wooden and form an arc as it goes round the corner and continues up the flight. This flight (appears coherent and has a consistency in style and material treatment.

The form and style of the staircase continue in this manner from first to second floor (20) and at the top of the second floor where it concludes. Whilst this appears to be unified, there is a telling sign of its later construction, as seen in the metal side joists (21) which periodically attach the baluster to the steps, giving support as the flights of stairs rise up.

The Ground floor rooms: Refer to photos 23-31

In the main room at the front, examples of the original architecture is seen in the architraves on the sash, the fireplace and the coving . The connection either side of the landing is announced by the well-formed doors where the appearance of a set of uniform architraves at no 165 is an enhancement.

The tiling on the floor is later addition. Whilst there is period skirting board it is not consistent or unified and illustrates the ad hoc approach to the space. Service ducts are also seen engineered onto the walls in many places including the Ladies WC lobby.

In the rear room, the windows are later metal casements and the sills are flat. The operating theatres are laid out for clinical purposes with much cupboarding and internal temporary screens to give divisions in space, The windows are semi boarded over in places to minimise the amount of natural light coming in to the space.

It is difficult to make out any historic or architectural character in these rear rooms. The surrounds to the doors have been flattened (30), so the architectural detail of the architrave is not apparent or visible. Only on the other side of the door (31) in the landing is this detail retained.

First Floor rooms: Refer to photos 32 – 38

At the west end of the floor there are a group of three spaces which are contained within the primary walls. The wall divisions, window openings and doors here are all later additions. In the Xray room , the windows are ordinary metal openings, the toilet sees a change in floor surface to the hall and whilst the kitchen has had all sorts of cabinets added to suit its purpose it has a sash window to give it quality.

In the waiting room, the **old fireplace** is centrepiece and the original mantle and jambs have been filled in with a glazed brick inner surround. The **coving and skirting** in this room appear to be consistent all the way round and along with the sash give the space a dignified manner. In the living room at the front, the **arch feature** is of some interest to the space, which when coupled with the sash windows and unified skirting gives some character.

Second Floor rooms: Refer to photos 39 – 45

The space is given over to store rooms with low ceilings and ordinary casement windows being noted. There is one point of historic interest seen in the fitted cupboard . In the next store room, the casement window is an old type as seen through the grooves on the mullions. Otherwise, in the four rooms on this floor there is no coving and the architraves are quite ordinary . Cupboards are embedded in the space to the side of the fireplace and skirting board is simple.

3.2.1 Summary of Previous changes

The layout of the early building has been remodelled. Obviously, the removal of the dividing wall between no 163 and 165 is the biggest change to have happened. Other smaller changes are noted. For example, the insertion of a room through the creation of a new dividing wall to create a corridor is seen on the first floor at the rear consulting room. Another change is seen in the entrance hall to no 163 where a kitchen and WC have been formed from new walls. In the basement, the stair at no 163 has been removed at some point.

These changes made previously to the floor plan/ layout of rooms and circulation have caused some damage to the building's integrity. The loss of architectural features such as the blocking of the fireplaces causes an underlying damaging impact on the character of the older building.

The adjustments which have been made to strengthen the staircase have been contrived around the historic fabric. The steel joists which span the length of the staircase are affixed to corresponding parts of the staircase on its return flight. In this way the support system is self-contained.

Previous interventions have led to some internal modifications where walls have been over-plastered, skirting replaced and ceilings suspended in places, to help incorporate new lighting and servicing lines. The cornicing does not follow an order with much of it being a later addition made to the décor probably in the 1980's. Its character suggests it is probably contemporary with changes in commercial organisation and respective tenant interests.

Previous adjustments have made various alterations to mouldings; Whilst decorative cornicing and skirting is unified to varying degrees in each room on the ground floor, there is no pattern throughout the space. Some spaces such as the ground floor corridor / entrance hall to 165 have unified cornicing and skirting, whilst in other areas such as the Ladies WC on the ground floor, the skirting is disjointed. The attractiveness of the first floor waiting room is given by the coving and skirting that appears to be consistent all the way round. The second floor rooms generally have no cornicing, a matter which reflects their former occupation in historic time by the serving classes.

In recent planning history, 2018, there is a record of 16 doors being replaced (See Plans in Appendix 2)

The approach to the decorative order of the flat has then been incidental and specific to individual rooms rather than the collection of rooms as a whole. This is indicative of unplanned approaches to conversions and refurbishments that are typical of the 1970's and 1980's.

Changing tastes of occupants is reflected through the basic modification of internal spaces, of which the addition of features such as cornicing, skirting and doors is most apparent.

The demand for hardware and particular business needs of previous commercial occupiers has overridden the respect of historical features. This will typically lead to walls being removed, holes being created for cables and interior doors being replaced, amongst many other unsuitable acts.

3.3 Exterior:

Front elevation

The principal elevation of the building and the terrace group in which it is located contributes positively to the conservation area and represents the early to mid-19th century development of the west side of Reading. The listing description appraises the exterior of the building for its Classical character, comprising parts of the front and roof which contribute to the whole. The building has symmetry and proportion based on traditional architecture and ornamentation is restrained and limited to the windows, Arched doorways and stucco cornice.

Therefore, the elevation is typical of the Georgian idiom and consequently, it contributes highly to the significance of the building. No's 163-165 illustrates how a building on a confined site both harmonizes with its surroundings and has gravitas. The frontage is enlivened by the glazing bar sashes and round headed ground floor windows, coupled with the hipped roof, flat eaves and off ridge chimneys.

3.4 Assessment of Significance

Criteria for Assessing Significance

The criteria used for assessing significance is based upon the Historic England guidance contained in Conservation Principle: Policy and Guidance. Criteria is also stated in Historic England's revised Statements of Heritage Significance¹. This document highlights the importance for Understanding the significance of heritage assets, in advance of developing proposals for buildings and sites, enabling owners and applicants to receive effective, consistent and timely decisions.

Significance has been categorised into three main headings:

- Archaeological interest: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity
- Architectural or artistic interest: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place
- Historic interest: the meaning of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective memory or experience.

¹ Historic England Advice Note 12, Published 21 October 2019

In some circumstances, scientific or technical value may be considered as a building may have used new technology or materials to achieve the design.

The building principally derives its significance from the overall form and shape, with symmetrical proportions in terms of window spacing and size. Indeed, the elevation of the building reads as one of unity with the other buildings in this stretch of Oxford Road, with similar bay treatments. The hipped shape of the roof is of interest and its unaltered state and integration into the later sequence of development is part of the significance of the structure.

One of the most interesting architectural elements of the interior is the open space formed around the central stairwell. As the location in the centre of the house is at odds with the position of the entrance Hall to the side. In a building from the Georgian period, the staircase would normally be sited at the end of the entrance hall from where access to the first floor would be taken. The evidence of a blocked door on the first floor suggests there may have been an opening once here which was connected to a staircase at the side.

Although it is not known if the staircase was in a different position in the earliest building, the form of the current staircase is dominant. Its period character is in keeping with the age of the building and it is clearly an important part of the changes made to the floor plan in the front and rear spaces around it.

The windows on the rear wall are clearly later additions, designed with security in mind and having little connection to the more refined windows to the front. The now concealed fireplaces in the central part of the front and rear are a part of the original structural scheme and contribute to an understanding of the building, and thus are of considerable significance.

The existing staircase structure is of the Georgian type and has had many alterations made to it over time. *The structure itself is of little significance, whilst it is the volume in which it is located that is important in understanding its role in the building.*

The listing mainly reflects the aesthetic and unified aspect of the late Georgian building and does not refer to the specific internal areas subject to this application.

i) Archaeological Interest

The Historic Environment Record (HERs) provides no record of any below ground finds at the site. No works are required below ground for the scheme. The archaeological interest is of low significance.

ii) Architectural interest:

The contribution of the architecture to the significance of the building

No 163 – 165 is a building with a strong streetscape presence. It has a well massed front elevation with the hipped slate roof and eaves providing a coherent facade. Its Georgian style as illustrated through the roof pitch and symmetrical windows, is a good example of the type of respectable design many of Reading's buildings adopted.

External visual quality is given by the appearance of the frontage, its layout and plan. The historic interior has been altered in a way in which it is still possible to read the building as an example of a building shaped around a central movement hub with limited original decoration.

There is a legible floor plan whose architectural interest is gained through the surviving rooms in a linear plan form. Although the walls have been opened to give unity to the ground floor space and part of the first floor space, it is still possible to understand the former line of separation and how the space would have worked before it was altered.

The function of the existing building can be interpreted and is expressed for example in the interconnected rooms with doors spanning the two sides of the staircase/ landing on each floor. The provision of living accommodation on first and second floor has seen the modification of internal spaces and the addition of features such as cornicing, skirting and doors.

One of the most interesting architectural elements of the interior is the surviving brick structure as witnessed in the fireplaces and the primary walls in which the main space is enclosed. This is coupled with the staircase which is of quality too. Although they have been boarded over the actual chimney structure itself is preserved in a much unaltered state. Whilst the staircase has seen more change in terms of the elements of the structure being renewed and strengthened.

The original structure of the Georgian building (as read from the basement) and surviving parts of the interior (such as the fireplaces and the windows) are all important elements of the rooms in the building. To the rear the more functional and secondary character of the building is highlighted through the metal casement windows.

It is significant that not all elements of the wall fabric survive, as seen through the removed wall either side of the fireplace. There is an inconsistent pattern through the floors of the building on either side of the fireplace. On the ground floor the space is open on all 4 sides, on the first floor the fireplace is open only on one side, whilst on the second floor it is open on 2 sides.

Artistic/ Aesthetic

The design and orientation of the building together with its setting give it a prominence that stands within the group of buildings on the south side of Oxford Road and give it special interest and significance. It has some significance in being an ancillary part of the built hierarchy along Oxford Road.

The recent upgrades and refurbishments are not visible from the public realm and have only altered the context of the listed building as seen from inside. In essence, the building as a whole contributes along with the buildings to its sides to the enhancement of the town aesthetically. The townscape interest is of Medium - High significance.

As a space re-designed for residential purposes the building shares a mixture of internal decoration, with paint finishes and wallpaper expressing the style of recent occupants. An attractive incidence of mouldings takes place in the landing at the bottom of the first floor stairs where a well profiled line of skirting has a smooth and curved character and it runs along the edge of the stair treads from first to ground floor. The adoption of other decorative features and fittings (i.e. cupboards) give an understanding of how the interior has been adapted. These give a Low-Medium significance to the building.

iii) Historic interest:

The historic context of the building

The present building has undergone some alterations, but the architectural structure of the original building can be discerned from the inner plan based on the ground, first and second floors. From this it is possible to interpret how the needs of a family were combined within a building that was a dwelling for all of its life. It is also possible to work out how the living areas were organised, with family rooms on the ground and first floor and staff on the lower ground.

The way in which the building has been adapted to changing requirements adds to its historical interest. This includes the reorientation of the central stair and its change to an open plan space as befits the needs of tenants. Internal alterations are also evidence of the buildings ability to accommodate change, as *the staircase has been renewed* to better accommodate the growing importance of the movement between ground and first floor and between first and second floor. Changes made to the staircase area are synonymous with changes in the building's operation and the intensification of commercial use.

The surviving elements of the historic interior is an example of a building's structure, decoration and craftsmanship intended as a private home. In terms of the contribution made by the building to the area, the building is of historic interest in providing context and a part of the setting. It is also an example of a particular building type (house) that displays technical innovation. The historical interest is of High significance

i) Communal

With respect to its communal value it is a building whose presence relates strongly to the development of the area in the early 19th century. Its location on the roadside and relationship to the group of buildings of Oxford Road give it a sense of gravitas in the shared consciousness of residents and visitors to the area.

Summary of Significance

Of the ***highest significance*** and of great sensitivity to change:

- An example of a terraced building of the Georgian period, whose appearance in Red brick, stucco cornice, slate roofs and steps to the principal storey makes a great contribution to the Conservation Area.

Of ***moderate significance*** are:

- The internal decoration and layout on the ground and first floor which, although changed, can be read with the original;
- The location of the fireplaces and chimney stack on the location of the former dividing wall between 163 and 165.
- The Georgian looking staircase whose flights are distinguished by the wooden baluster, spindles and newel posts. These elements appear to have been renewed at a later time (1980's?) and the appearance of steel support joists to the stair frame dissects its integrity.

- Windows in their former unaltered state to the front;

Of **neutral significance**, neither contributing to nor detracting from the significance of the whole, are:

- Modern finishes including modern floor tiles, partition walls, mouldings and ceiling lights.
- Internal doors have been mainly upgraded and altered
- Windows have been upgraded and are modern casements;
- Elements of the staircase which appear to have been renewed at a later time, meaning it is not an original feature;

The interior of 163 – 165 has been subject to a range of alterations in its previous incarnations, leaving much of the fabric as having changed. Architectural features have generally been upgraded and most of the decoration is of a later age to the original building.

Amongst this background of change, there are some surviving elements of importance which should be retained and by which the proposed can be measured.

Features to retain

- Ground floor layout, including entrance hall and arch
- Fireplaces
- Staircase
- architraves, dado rail and skirting board on the entrance hall and landing;

THE PROPOSED SCHEME

3.5 Design Objectives

New Flats

The proposal will see the spaces used for the existing use of the dental surgery on the ground floor rationalised. On the ground floor an opening will be made and the space filled with a door to facilitate an internal corridor, making rear consulting rooms smaller and more enclosed.

The application considers the organisation of the space at the top of the stair on the first floor of no 165 so as to facilitate the new bedroom of the flat that will occupy this part of the building. It will be necessary to remove and then relocate a partition wall so as to make ensuite to wardrobe.

In Flat 3, small changes are made to the arrangements of doors at the top of stairs, giving a more private sense to the resident. As the blocked door is opened up creating a link to the dining area and kitchen which are on the flank of the space in existing rooms. The open wall to the side of the current living area will be utilised for making an open plan kitchen/ living room area.

One change which effects both new flats is the filling in of the wall by the rear fireplace. A new door will be put into the newly created wall to the side of the fireplace between the two flats, thereby giving exclusive access to the new accommodation created here.

On the 2nd floor, the changes in the space are limited to the creation of a partition wall on the side of the fireplace in the rear room, thus creating separation between bedroom and bathroom, or an en-suite. The other change is alteration to the length of the corridor wall which is being adapted to reflect new door openings in the location off the Hall at the top of the stairs.

Floor Plan

The open space between the rear space and the front space is the subject of the applicant's proposals. Currently it has a general use and a certain lack of privacy to the consulting and residential areas to the sides. This constrains the use of this area for patients and doctors as well as for personal use.

The internal refurbishment will retain those elements and features of the original building that are of historic and architectural significance, ensuring that the floor plan continues to be legible. It is intended to retain the current open plan nature of the ground floor as befits the uses of the dental practise.

On the first and second floor it is intended to restore the former division between no 163 and 165, by filling in the void to the side of the fireplace. Thereby a flat is created either side of the party wall and the former character of the space as being divided is returned.

The refitting and modification that is proposed is directed towards the areas (landing and entrance hall) that will not be changed in their scale or character; there will not therefore be an undue impact on the integrity of the building.

In its current form the second floor is of some significance, as it is an original part of the building whose layout has seen little change. So, it is fitting that the design proposed for its future use as two flats seeks to incorporate elements of the old building that give it character. There is little in the way of original decorative paraphernalia in its correct position, so its removal can be done without harming the importance of the building.

The insertion of a new partition wall to create separation for an en-suite is a non-obtrusive means of enhancing the spaces of Flat 3 and Flat 4 on the first floor. The current disposition of the rear space on the First Floor leads to a lack of privacy and the overlap from the room at 163 to 165 is not conducive to separate flats and living arrangements. So, by reinstating the dividing wall, the current corridor is closed off and separate access can be brought to the newly formed spaces at Flat 3 and Flat 4.

It is known that the previous layout of the space was as a separate flat (staff accommodation), so it is practical and sensitive to the former division of the building, to rearrange the access and movement at the top of the stairs. To enable this restoration to its earliest form, many changes are intended to the space that connects the top of the staircase with the rear room which is to become Flat 3.

New partition walls for Flat 3 and Flat 4 can be inserted (see below) in a way that minimises impact on the fabric of the fireplace it abuts. It can also be dismantled at a future time if the owner wishes to revert to the former plan.

Approach to alterations: Summary of options

The proposed conversion would be mindful of the key features of significance. The proposed will provide a sustainable use for the listed building that will ensure its maintenance and periodic upkeep. This complies fully with guidance given by Historic England which supports change where a sustainable long term use for a building can help in maintaining its ongoing upkeep.

The alterations are engineered to retain as much as possible of the original historic fabric of the building, ensuring that new partition walls and the introduction of services pay special regard to the character and appearance of the building and respect its form, scale, architectural design and materials.

The above assessment identifies the location and hierarchy of rooms at no 163-165 to be an important element of its architectural interest. The design envisaged to the internal spaces does then pay consideration to the 'known' original room arrangement, historic floor levels, the historic fabric of the building and the original purpose of the building.

It is possible to make the necessary changes and upgrade the buildings use without affecting the surviving elements which make the building unique. The detail of the scheme removes the likelihood of alterations causing harm to the historic fabric of the old dividing wall, especially as it is intended to restore this element.

Where work is needed that will potentially disturb some existing historic fabric, the proposal is to keep as much of the original fabric as possible and position any new items discretely where possible and where their function is not compromised. So, with the case of the new door on ground floor entrance hall, it may be possible to recycle the lost material in a location where gaps in the wall are being filled. Also, it will be important for the new door to be of the same dimensions as the original doors seen in the building.

Chasing is preferred to drilling into the building fabric, as it penetrates the surface of the brick or stone and can be disguised by the building up of lost fabric once the pipe is inserted. Another preferred method for securing piping into old walls is by fixing the cables into *sacrificial materials*, such as mortar joints between brickwork and stonework. In this scenario the safest route for incorporating new services is by creating a shallow box that abuts the wall.

In the situation where new openings and chases into fabric cannot be avoided, then it is often possible to minimise the loss of historic fabric through ensuring that as many services as possible share common routes

4.0 PROPOSED CONVERSION IN RELATION TO ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC CHARACTER

Change has already been brought about by former alterations and upgrades to the building. The former original layout of the double depth building can be made out in the current floor plan, although it has undergone major change in the part demolition of the dividing wall. The staircase too is in an unusual location being placed in the centre of the building.

4.1 Design Approach and Appraisal

i) General

The character of historic buildings and their contribution to the townscape can be severely diminished through insensitive alteration or extension, or through neglect and dilapidation. In the case of No 163 – 165 the Applicant has put forward a practical solution to effectively utilise the whole of the building, thereby allowing it to be viable for long-term residential objectives whilst realising the historic and architectural qualities of the building.

The alterations have been designed so as to realise the heritage value of the building in a way that promotes its significance rather than causes harm to it.

The spaces of the building are currently divided according to its dental function, with the central staircase providing movement in the central axis, from which the front and rear rooms are located. To landing at the top of the stairs on each floor is a core by which separate rooms are reached either by a corridor or by a door which directly connects.

The new scheme sees the use of individual rooms for the separate functions of private accommodation, sleeping, eating/ cooking and living. With regards the plan for a combined kitchen/ living area, it is beneficial that the size of the front room in both flats on the first and second floors are utilised in this way.

In the early days the subject property was used as dwelling by 'influential' local families and professionals. In the second half of the twentieth century it has seen some modifications to suit the expanding interests of the owners, before coming into a state of partial occupation in recent years. Therefore, the proposals to refurbish the residential component of the building will concur with its current use and therefore accords with national and local recommendations.

The proposed to divide the flat through re-introducing the dividing wall and making new openings will result in an improved balance of interlinked spaces, allowing for ease of circulation within the context of the ground and first floor; this creates an improved relationship of space and a better understanding of the historic building.

It is noted that the use for the ground floor will differ to the upper floors and so there is a slight variation in how the spaces are arranged. Indeed, the need for seamless movement between different rooms in a dentist can continue to utilise the existing spaces around the fireplace and the unity in floor area between 163 and 165. Whilst the needs for separate flat accommodation require these spaces to be filled.

The proposal is constructed so as to respect the elements of the building that have architectural and historic significance, So, the original internal walls and architraves to doors stay the same, whilst the concealed chimney shafts are also retained. There are two places (Entrance Hall) where internal walls will be opened up to create doors on the ground floor. The scheme is mindful; that this can be done with a view to reusing the lost material possibly as infill to the fireplace.

Taking the previous use of the upper storeys as accommodation into account, the proposed to change the space to four self-contained dwellings is suitable. Currently the living arrangement is rather ramshackle and so it is positive that a design can be applied to it that rationalised the uses around the existing plan form.

The floor plan is such that new flats can be created either side of the central landing, without altering the main layout,

The dimensions of the significant rooms to the back and front will not be touched by the proposals. Instead, the plan is to restore an area where the dividing wall was previously located. This will facilitate the conversion into four flats, with the rooms on the first and second floor being close to what they would have been in Georgian times.

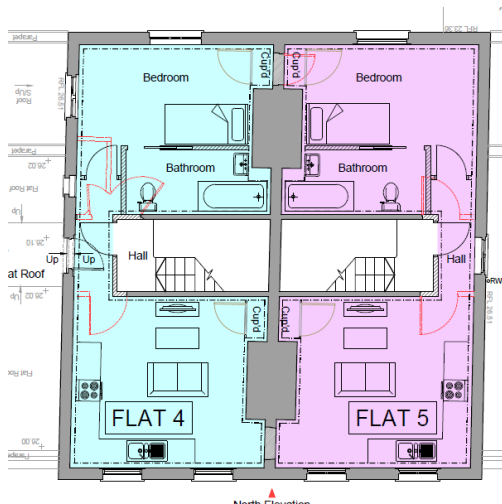
The works proposed have been designed to have limited impact on the historic fabric and have been crafted to carefully mitigate any damage that may occur. The method and detail of the approach to the changes proposed is given below.

The aim to improve the overall quality of housing, with better lighting, improved size and functionality of rooms is achieved within the proportions of former living space. Through reintroducing elements of the historic layout, such as the dividing wall, heritage value can be restored.

Works are proposed to rationalise the first floor of the property, reinstating the earlier layout and reflecting the overall plan-form of the original dwelling. Overall the impact of the proposed development on the existing structure is minimal and there will be no impact on the street scene.

i) In Detail:





2nd floor

Figure 4: Proposed floor-plan changes

A. The configuration to four self-contained flats

The space of the landing is the key circulation area and the completion of the wall between the front rooms and the landing and the addition of a door to the rear rooms, will create a logical order of space which enable the former dimensions of the space to be restored. This will redefine the space as it was when the inner wall marked the space finishing at the landing.

On the first floor it is proposed to insert an inner partition, enabling access from the landing to be gained through a new doorway. The opening is in the position of a current blocked doorway and so refers to the likely historic means of movement. Therefore, the connection of the rear room with the landing can be facilitated in order to re-establish privacy and access into the flat.

The landing will continue to be defined, as it has throughout its history in relation to the respective openings and the sense of the space being divided into the rear and front. The basis for separating the front from the back of the building gains much credit from knowledge that Georgian buildings would often have such a division, with the public (entertaining spaces) at the front and the private (family) spaces at the rear.

In its current 'known' form the original layout of the building has seen changes of which the opening up of the rooms and spaces is critical. It is therefore fitting that the design proposed for the creation of two flats seeks to re-establish the wall around the fireplace and so incorporate elements of the old building that give it character.

Internal wall and doors

Works are proposed to significantly improve the internal area, up to modern standard, whilst giving the space a layout that refers to the earlier plans. The purpose is to seal the opening so as to make the general space occupied by one flat (staff/ living accommodation) over 2 floors into four separate flats.

The insertion of a wall considers the current size, scale and manner of the building and the known former dimensions to which they relate. It will be applied to the same thickness, texture and profile of the existing wall so as not to detract from its former quality.

The new scheme offers the chance to establish new useable spaces within the building so that the part-opened up first and second floor become self-contained rooms, rather than an open space.

The new doors on the ground floor will refer to the profile and detail of adjacent 'historic' architraves in the corridor, but by being a contemporary specification will not ameliorate the importance of the latter but rather provide an enhancement and an improved means of viewing the old against the new. With regards to the size and style of the doors, it is possible to see a common pattern in the size of openings seen in most of the doors. It would be suitable to choose the architrave style which most reflects that which is typical, as seen in the doors to the Consulting rooms for example.

Ground Floor alterations

The key change to this space is the improvements to access to serve the operation of the Dentist and to ensure the transition to residential accommodation upstairs is kept separate. An internal corridor will be facilitated through the creation of an opening with a new door to the inner wall of the entrance hall.

Whilst giving designated access to the rear consulting rooms, these spaces will be smaller and more enclosed.

All three doors which currently open onto the staircase landing will be blocked, thereby making access to the rear consulting rooms only available from the hallway of no 163. The openings in the hallway wall are necessary to enable the corridor to extend through to the respective hallways and thereby bringing full movement between both entrance halls.

In helping to express the purpose of the new flats above, a door will be located at bottom of the stair to make it feel more residential and private. This will be formed in a partition wall and will lightly abut the internal walls that enclose the staircase.

At no 163 there is a new staircase in entrance hall. This may possibly reinstate the location of a stair in former life of the building and there are many examples of Georgian buildings with stairs in this location if an example is needed. This links in with the movement given by the central corridor that is created to spread across the building providing connection of the hallways in both buildings.

A new door opening is made to the Waiting room to serve new access from the hall. The space on the sides of the fireplace will remain the same, with only the front room being filled with a wall and door as is current.

First Floor alterations

At the rear of the first floor many changes are required to enable the formation of Flat 3. The current open corridor that connects the consulting rooms on 163 with no 165 will be divided at the point of the fireplace. Such a move will restore this rear space to its former aspect with rooms divided either side of the party wall marked by the fireplace and chimney breast.

A partition wall will be removed and a new one created on the side of chimney stack, so as to make ensuite to wardrobe. In the entrance hall of no 163, existing spaces will be utilised, with the Xray room becoming a bathroom and WC a store. There is an existing partition wall which will be retained.

In Flat 3, small changes are made to the arrangements of doors at the top of stairs, giving more privacy to the future occupant. As the blocked door will be opened up to create a link to the dining area and kitchen which are on the flank of the space in existing rooms. The open wall to the side of the current living area will be utilised for making an open plan kitchen/ living room area.

The two front rooms will largely remain the same and the design of the flat here is accommodated within the existing floor plan. The only notable change is the opening up of a blocked door in no 163

Second Floor alterations

On the 2nd floor, the changes in the space are limited to the creation of a wall on the side of the fireplace in the rear room, thus creating separation between no 163 and no 165. In keeping with the floor below this reinstates the quality of the former space as divided either side of the chimney breast. This change also enables the bedroom and bathroom to be created either side of a semi wall or as an en-suite.

At the front, Flat 4 and Flat 5's separation will be harnessed through the filling in of the blocked door to the side of the fireplace

The other change is alteration to the length of the corridor wall which is being adapted to reflect new door openings in the location off the Hall at the top of the stairs.

Otherwise, the internal plan will entirely legible and it will be possible to read the original character of the space based around the elements of the proposed.

The dividing wall

The reintroduction of the wall on the first and second storey respects the authenticity of the floor plan and it accurately reflects the form and character of the old building. There is plenty of references that show Georgian buildings would have a dividing wall between the front and back.

The scheme forms a response to the original proportions of the building and it is positive that the interior can be reordered whilst also achieving improved functionality befitting a residential use.

The design of 4 flats can be achieved within the existing plan-form of the building. Also, as the introduction of partition walls in selected places is not a permanent feature it creates the potential for it to be reversible to future occupants/ developers.

New door openings are intended to be created in places by the ground floor corridor and first floor flats. They will closely follow the common type of door and architrave seen in several places within the building, thus forming a consistency. The door openings will be in keeping with the staircase and do not protrude into its line.

4.2 Impact on architectural and historic character

The listed building is important and contributes to the quality of the built environment in Reading. With respects to the proposals for no 163 – 165 it is important to ensure that the architectural detailing of the building to which the development relates is not eroded or that the quality of the setting is compromised.

The proposal to reconfigure spaces and introduce some new partition walls will facilitate an improved appreciation of the special architectural and historic interest of the building. The new residential accommodation will inevitably have an effect on the existing layout, and it is arranged so it has minimal harm to the fabric and will restore the upper floors to their original format.

Through an in depth understanding of the building and its context it is possible to evaluate the heritage impacts accruing from the proposals. This statement recognises the potential for allowing the building to evolve and follow its historic continuum in a way that has little or no impact on the character or appearance of the building. The proposals bring an opportunity to reinstate some of the original features that have been lost and make a positive contribution to the history of the building.

The proposals mainly take place on the first floor where existing walls remain the same and the reordering of space is done within the existing shell.

It is intended that the existing spaces within the building will be refurbished to improve the aspect of the existing accommodation with the facilities associated with four flats. The degree of refurbishing required is relatively light as the rooms do not require repair and only need some decoration treatments.

Later additions such as the cornice and skirting can be removed and reformed without harming architectural or historic importance of the building. Spaces generally follow current and historic alignments so as to respect the integrity of the earlier structure.

Movement will remain similar to the current patterns of access as given by the circulation around the staircase core. A key principle of the proposal is that there will be no changes to the structure of the old building and that the only alteration are brought about by the insertion of corridors and partition walls is done in such a way that it will not cause a loss of structural strength and it will blend into the existing character of the space.

It is commendable that a design solution can be found that causes such little impact on the historic significance of the building. Earlier remnants of the building such as the windows and fireplaces are still a source of its historic integrity and will be integrated into the new design to ensure distinctive features of the old are blended into the new.

4.3 Impacts on the Interior significance

Effects of change on the architectural and historic significance of the interior have been mitigated in the design and features identified as important to the listed building are retained. This includes the interesting architectural elements of the building's interior such as the ground floor arch in the entrance hall, the now-boarded fireplaces and location of staircases which all give a solid example of structural intent.

The proposed interventions will have an impact on circulation, making an improvement on the more recent examples of dividing the space. The prospect for returning it to its former historical floor plan on the first and second floor is to be welcomed. Changes to the layout can be reversed at a later time should residential or commercial demands require. So, the proposals will not have a negative impact on the primary building structure, sash windows on the front elevation and the fireplaces of the building.

The scale of the proposals does not overwhelm the nature of the existing building. The corridor (ground floor) and new partitions (first floor) allow for emphasis on the original building rather than disturb the balance of the significant architectural composition.

Through reopening blocked doors (front of Flat 2 and rear of Flat 3), the proportions of the internal space are not altered, thereby continuing to bring visual benefits to people entering the building. The proposal is sustainable and will ultimately allow for occupants in future generations to use the space in a way which will not cause any impact on the listed building or its foundations.

Impacts on External significance

The overall intention is to make slight adjustments that are of a sympathetic design and provide comfortable accommodation. Works are proposed to rationalise the spaces of the property, whilst ensuring the changes still relate to the basic principle of Georgian layout (based on a landing with axial rooms) and retaining the character of some historic features such as the windows and fireplaces.

Overall the impact of the proposed development on the existing structure is minimal and there will be no impact on the street scene. The proposed will not have any repercussions on the external significance of the building as they are sited within.

4.4 Heritage Impact Summary

The design process for the proposal is to carry out the minimum amount of work necessary to the internal parts of the property. This will include intrusions of a ground floor corridor and the enhancement of the landing area/ stairway on the first and second floors through the formation of 4 flats. This ensures that the premises retain its character and the property is not altered outside of what is considered acceptable for a listed building.

Given that the significance of the building is brought about by its front elevation, the new design is not considered to damage these primary features of historic or architectural interest. With the exception of the windows and fireplaces, the upper floors comprise features of secondary or later architectural importance such as cornicing and skirting. So, by selectively stripping out these later inconsistent elements and reinstating dado and skirting based on the good examples (seen on ground floor entrance hall) given the scheme can carefully reintroduce a stronger historic narrative to this building.

The proposals detailed above ensure that those elements of architectural interest within the property are retained, saving them for future generations and making them fit for modern day living. It should be noted that should future owners wish to reinstate the open format of the front and rear space around the fireplace, then this would be possible at a future time.

Given that the significance of no. 163 - 165 is brought about by the succession of development around the original 18th century building form, the examples of recent partition walls, doors and ceilings follow on from previous interventions. So, as the internal parts of the building are generally formed by a small amount of layering of new parts, the proposed is not considered materially to damage the historic or architectural interest.

The premise for closing the open wall to the side of the fireplace allows for current and future generations to also adapt the internal spaces to suit new social requirements, without ever having to alter the elements of the building that make it historically and architecturally important.

The two front rooms will remain dominant in the hierarchy of rooms as they would have been in the early 19th century. The space in the rear rooms represents a different level of importance in the occupancy of the space in the past, as they were typically used by family members in their day to day activities.

The application will continue the sense of the linear plan form when first built. The preservation of primary walls and original features within this listed building is important to understanding its historic character and how it may well have functioned as a place for public and private matters.

In summary, the internal alterations will have no impact on the heritage of the building but rather aim to restore some of the previous quality of the space for which it has been noted. The works will therefore preserve the special architectural and historic interest of this listed building.

4.5 Heritage Assessments

The NPPF constitutes the government's current national guidance and policy regarding development within the historic environment. The NPPF is a material consideration that must be considered in planning decisions and in this respect, it includes a clear policy framework for local planning authorities and decision makers. It reiterates that planning law requires applications to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The alterations to the listed building need to be considered against Local Plan Policy's and conservation guidance which is set out in the NPPF. There is also the statutory requirement that the local planning authority:

"shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses"².

The NPPF advises of the desirability of any development for:

"sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses "consistent with conservation"³."

² Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, 66.1,

³ NPPF 185

It goes on to say that:

"great weight should be given to the asset's conservation... as heritage assets are irreplaceable⁴."

4.6 Local Plan Assessments

The Council has a duty to conserve and enhance the significance, character and appearance of the borough's historic environment. The NPPF requires Reading Borough Council to take into account:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness;
- and opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

Policy DMS2 (Managing the historic environment) is considered important as the plans are designed so that the significance, appearance, character and setting of the heritage asset is continued. Policy DMH5 on alterations and extensions, is also relevant because of the impact these can have on the historic environment.

With regards to changes made to a listed building, policy EN1 is assessed:

The proposals ensure that substantial weight will be given to the benefit of protecting and conserving the particular interest that accounts for the building's designation. With regard to the interior and the area around the staircase core where the new wall/ doors are being inserted, the best quality materials will be used and it will reflect the historic context of the interior as found throughout the building.

The design proposed for the division of the new flats is considered appropriate to its context and as it is restored according to the historic building plan, it will bring great benefits to the building.

With regards to alterations to Listed Buildings, EN6 is reviewed:

Care should be taken in altering listed buildings to ensure that the character of the building is not harmed and that the architectural and visual qualities are respected. In this respect it is considered that the proposals are in keeping with the character of the original building in terms of design, scale and materials. The known format of the original building has been used to influence the design of the new.

The proposals are usable, durable and adaptable, and make a positive contribution to the distinctiveness of the building. Through having a high standard of design for the new flats it complements the heritage of the building.

⁴ NPPF 193

With regards to impacts on Heritage:

The statement considers how the alterations are based on an accurate understanding of the significance of the asset and respect the architectural character, historic fabric and detailing of the original building. The retention of the original structure, features and plan form that contribute to the significance of the asset is a major benefit of the scheme and gives the building a quality that does not detract from the intrinsic historic interest of the building.

Special attention has been paid to:

- conserving original architectural features such as windows, chimney stacks, decorative features such as an arch and select mouldings;
- the scale, proportions, design and materials of new proposals in relation to the existing heritage asset;
- the effect of development on the setting of the historic heritage asset;

The specific physical features of architectural and historic interest identified in the listing and survey have been positively integrated into the scheme. The retention of the fabric of the original building will ensure its preservation.

4.7 NPPF (National Policy, 2019) assessments

The NPPF constitutes the government's current national guidance and policy regarding development within the historic environment. The NPPF is a material consideration that must be considered in planning decisions and in this respect, it includes a clear policy framework for local planning authorities and decision makers.

It reiterates that planning law requires applications to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Section 16 of the revised NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the historic environment in paragraphs 184 to 202. The NPPF places much emphasis on heritage "significance", defined as:

*"The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting."*⁵

The effects of any development on a heritage asset therefore need to be assessed against the four components of its heritage significance: its archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest. Paragraph 189 makes it clear that the level of detail should be i) proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset and ii) no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on the significance of the heritage asset.

The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The policies of NPPF, taken as a whole, constitute the Government's view of what sustainable development in England means in practice for the planning system.

⁵ Annex 2, Glossary, p.74

According to paragraph 200, local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within settlements and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

Applying this to the site it follows that the greater the degree of change in an area deemed to be significant or contributory to significance, the greater the potential for harm and the need to proportionately justify that harm.

In respects to NPPF the following criteria for assessment are important in establishing the credibility of the proposal:

- Impact on significance (187, 188 and 189)
- Suitable design (110, 124, 125 and 126)
- Conservation of heritage assets (20, 185, 192 and 193)

IN RELATION TO PARAGRAPH 187, 188 and 189: the significance of the heritage assets affected and the contribution of their setting to that significance

In the setting of 163 – 165 Oxford Road there are two types of heritage asset; the listed building, as composed of the group of buildings, 149-169, Oxford Road; and the Conservation Area. The section on Historic Summary (2.2), listed building designation (2.3) and Conservation Area context (2.4) give information to help understand the significance of the heritage asset

No 163 – 165 is a grade II listed building whose significance rests in its architectural value, as a fine example of an early 19th century building that has not been altered on its front. It is also of historical value as it illustrates the way in which the building type in general developed during pre/ Victorian times into the modern era, remaining as an example of a space that has been utilised for commercial accommodation with some residential use retained above. The exterior is largely unaltered whilst the interior has been subject to a range of interventions, the most important of which was the opening up of the space between 163 and 165, to form open plan units.

IN RELATION TO PARAGRAPHS 110, 124, 125 and 126: the consideration of design should include scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and use.

The proposal to divide the internal space is an accomplished configuration based around the central volume of the staircase. It will not permanently alter the plan form and it refers to the knowledge that floor spaces in historic times often had separations between the front and rear. The interventions will use the appropriate conservation materials and be applied by a skilled craftsman.

IN RELATION TO PARAGRAPHS 20, 185, 192 and 193: Weight given to the significance of a designated heritage asset and its conservation

Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As the building is a designated heritage asset the impact of the proposals on the building have been carefully evaluated.

As has been stated, the building's historical significance (as part of urban Reading) is conclusive. Internal spaces have been largely retained within the confines of the original building. The front and rear rooms are recognised in their current form, although they have been partly obscured by the introduction of discrete partition walls to facilitate storage and consulting rooms. In such a way the significance of the internal space has been lessened throughout the previous uses.

Therefore, it is positive that the intention to reintroduce the dividing wall restores the significance of the internal space. And it will maintain the movement axis through the building, whilst referring to a more enclosed layout which concurs with historic notions of floor plans.

The conservation benefit of the proposal effectively sees much thought in the design process and how the new relates to historic features on the inside. This aims to minimise conflict and bring greater clarity to the floor plan of a building which has already been much adapted.

4.8 Policy Summary

Paragraph 185 of the NPPF requires any harm to the designated heritage asset to be clearly and convincingly justified. Local Plan policies referred to above state that proposals to alter a listed building will only be permitted where it would not result in the damage or loss of features of special architectural or historic interest and where the character and appearance or setting of the building would be preserved or enhanced.

In consideration of the policy assessments, the installation of a partition corridor wall will, along with the reformed dividing wall, contribute positively to the character, distinctiveness and significance of the listed building and the wider historic environment.

The proposed offers a solution to utilising the internal footprint of no 163 – 165, whilst ensuring that the features that give this building its character, are retained.

In respects to the weight given to the heritage significance, the work proposed to the interior has fundamentally recognised the integrity and value of remaining historic fabric. So, the interpretation of historically significant features is a key part of the set of proposals created for bringing the front and rear space of the building back to life in the form of four flats. At the same time, it secures the continued quality of the front elevation.

Qualities which still give the building historic and architectural credence, such as the 19th century fireplaces are to be retained whilst the internal appearance and character of the staircase is being rationalized through the addition of a corridor and more personal settings (such as hall areas and doors) that fit the exclusive use of flats.

4.9 Heritage Benefits of the proposed design

The proposed actively seeks to preserve those elements that make a positive contribution to the asset, such as the structural fabric of the property and the quality of its internal spaces. It provides a means for improving the spatial order and thereby making it fully habitable. It does this through helping to enhance the significance of the heritage asset by the improvement to the layout and the way the spaces work.

The installation of a central corridor system will facilitate the separation of the dental rooms from the upstairs uses and therefore creates an opportunity for the building to be divided up into 4 flats.

Elements of the interior such as the architraves will be improved and balanced against new doors, thus giving a new interpretation to a part of the buildings early 19th century character.

A number of other potential heritage benefits that weigh in favour of this scheme include the following:

- It enhances the significance of a heritage asset;
- The rationalisation of the stairwell volume through a new corridor and access to upper floor flats, better reveals the significance of the heritage asset;
- This will, therefore, enhance enjoyment of it and the sense of identity and place;
- The creation of 4 separate flats can be done whilst retaining the integrity of the first and second floor and preserving any original features;
- The retention of features such as the fireplaces, skirting and cornicing in Hallway and windows is a central part of the scheme and it is positive that the new arrangements can be made around the old parts, helping to isolate and direct focus on their significance;
- The scale and detailing are carefully arranged, so as to respect the former layout and plan of the historic building;
- Its compact layout is well adapted to improved residential use;
- Heritage value can be restored whilst making improvements in the overall quality of housing;
- The arrangement of spaces is in keeping with the historic and later positions of rooms;
- The changes are an appropriate design that relates to its context and make a positive contribution to the appearance, character and quality of the historic environment; and
- it does not detract from other evidential, historic, aesthetic or communal heritage values.

In respects of National Policy, the degree of the harm caused to the historic environment is minimal and is not compromised when balanced against the wider design and planning benefits. With respects to the Local Plan the remodelling and improvement of the existing building will have no impact on the special interest of 163- 165 Oxford Road.

We remind the reader that much of the planned changes are reversible and the methods of work are consistent with conservation principles.

This statement concludes that the proposals would be an appropriate solution to this listed building, particularly as a result of its design, which is based on a respect for traditional architecture, the historic floor plan and use of materials.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

In the history of this building, changes have clearly been made to the floor plan and internal decorations to make it habitable; Recent commercial uses have seen many changes to wall surfaces, floor surfaces and partition wall positions. The changes proposed now relate to a commitment to improve the quality of housing available in the area.

The proposal to fill the open walls to the side of the fireplace will ensure the great majority of this dividing wall is retained for future owners to enjoy if there be a new approach to the internal spaces.

This should not cause any harm or lessen its significance but rather be seen as an enhancement. In the spirit of conservation, no historic fabric would be lost but its preservation is managed in a way that allows current residential objectives to be met.

It has been shown that the current plan form is partly-original and so the proposal to re-establish the divisions in the spaces of the rear and front rooms is a positive decision. The only change regards the orientation from the central stairwell space, allowing for users to connect with their private accommodations in a way that offers greater personal benefit.

The proposals will retain the linear plan form, demonstrating an improvement in the quality of the accommodation. There would not be any harm to historic fabric or the historic plan form of the building, as the former is being retained (where possible) and the latter will be restored on the first and second floors.

In weighing up the planning benefits, the 'public benefit' itself should warrant approval of the works proposed (re NPPF 131-134). With respects to Local Plan, the proposal preserves the integrity, plan form, the original hierarchy of historic floor levels and structure of the building including the arrangement of rooms, ceilings and corridors.

The proposed design and layout has been prepared having considered the defining character of the listed building and the constraints and opportunities imposed by its retained structure and unique features. It is intended that the existing spaces within the building will be refurbished to create new living accommodation with the facilities associated with modern day living.

The proposal respects the character of the building and its hierarchy whilst improving the space as a residential dwelling. In this way it meets the key objectives of the NPPF, in ensuring the design approach causes no harm to the character of the listed building.

APPENDIX 1; INTERNAL SURVEY



Plan of receptor points, with photography numbers

No 165: BASEMENT



1. Stair with later treads and skirting



2. Door/ architrave



3. Later baluster and spindles



4. Internal window



5. Fireplace



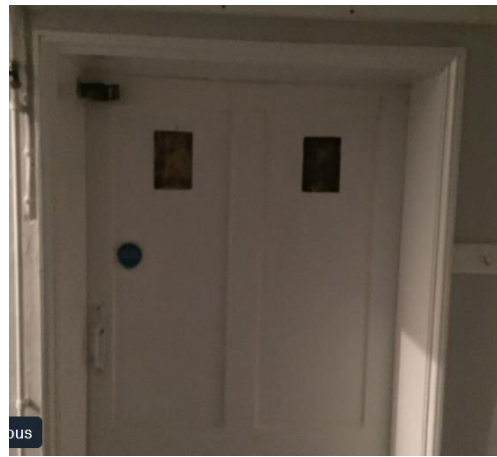
6. Original brick arch



7. Imitation architrave and old/ new timber beams



7. Timber beams in ceiling



10. Period architrave



8. Fire door

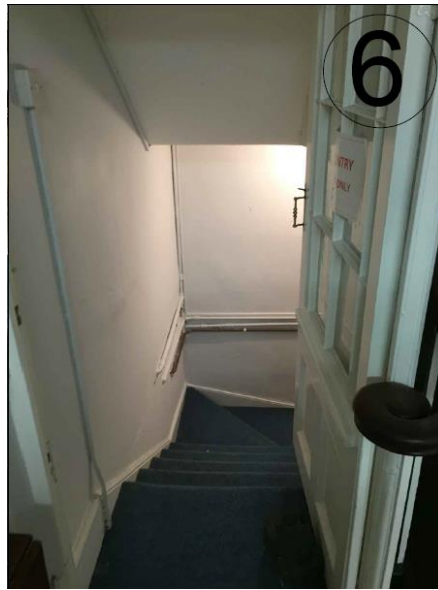


9. Rear door

GROUND FLOOR



11. Entrance hall/ corridor



12. Stairs to basement, Swirl on newel post



13. Ground to first floor stair to 165

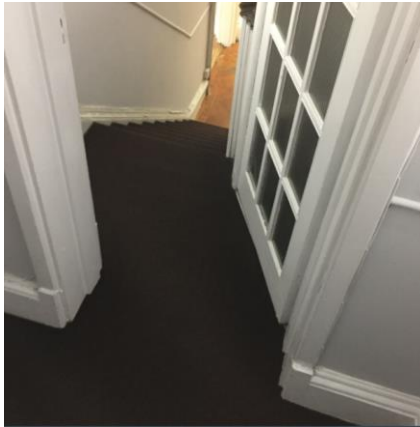


14. Corridor Arch

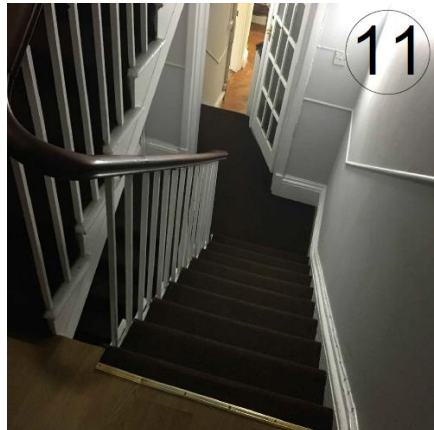


15. First floor corridor arch

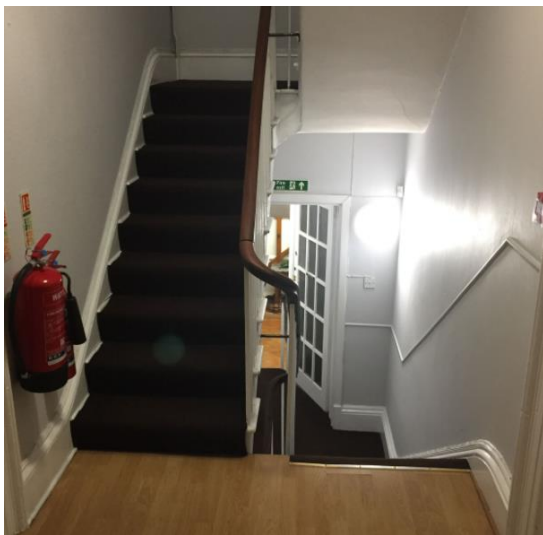
No 163



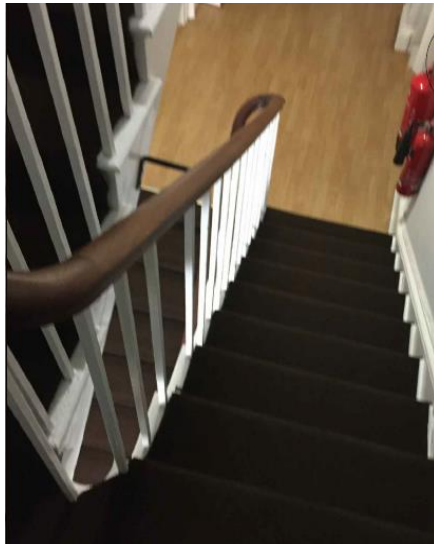
16. Ground floor door



17. First to ground stair



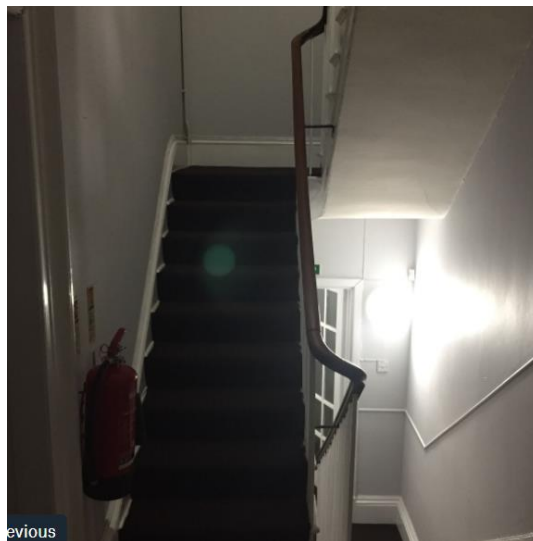
18. Ground to first stair



19. First to ground stair



20. first to second floor



21. Second floor



Stair support

GROUND FLOOR ROOMS



22



23 Windows



24 Blocked fireplace



25 Matching architraves either side of landing



26. Inconsistent skirting by WC



27 Metal windows to rear



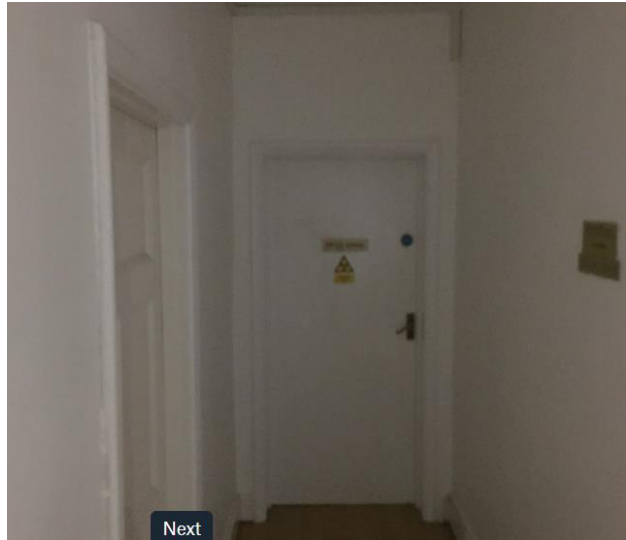
28 Consulting room



29 Boarded over windows



30 Flattened architrave



31 Profiled architrave

FIRST FLOOR



32 Metal window



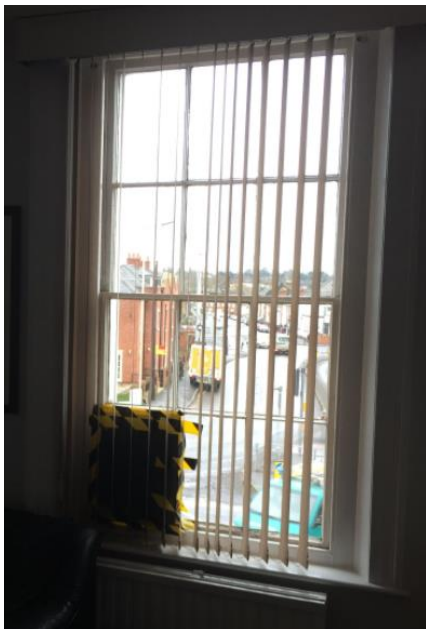
33 Change of floor surface



34 Sash window in kitchen



35 Fireplace



36 Sash



37 Arch feature



38 Sash window



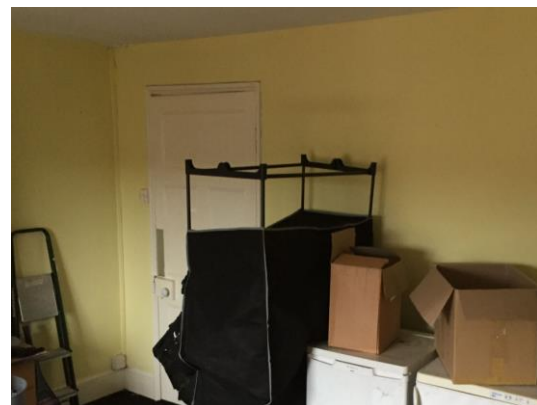
39 Casement window



40 Fitted cupboard



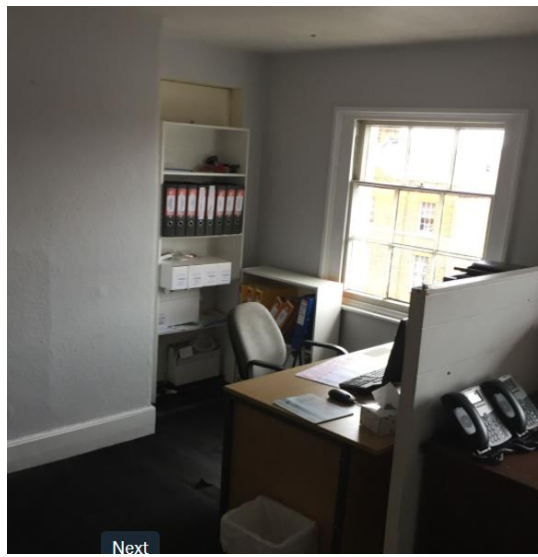
41 casement window



42 Ordinary architrave



43 Cupboard



44 Blocked fireplace



45 Sash