

HERITAGE STATEMENT rev. 02

Heritage Asset and its Setting:

Project Address: Store Conversion, Norcot Water Tower, 54 Norcot Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG30 6BU

Conservation Area: None

Listing Status: Within the curtilage of a Grade II Listed Water Tower List number: 1113623

Building Use: Unused store

Project Overview:

The conversion of an unused store and introduction of associated landscaping, next to a Grade II Listed water tower, into a one bedroom house. The existing water tower was converted in 2000 to 6no 2bed residential flats as part of a larger housing development in Tilehurst. The building in question was refurbished at the time and originally part of a number of stores built as part of its historic use as a builders yard.



Photo 1 – Front of the Store



Photo 2 The store within the context of the tower



Photo 3 Looking towards the store.



Photo 4 View towards the side of the store

In order to achieve the works, the following alterations/ interventions will be required:

- Conversion of the existing store into habitable accommodation
- New wall and gate to the front of the property to provide a defensible and private amenity space.
- New landscaping for both the new house and the water tower.
- Allocated parking and vehicular access.
- New cycle store behind the tower for the users of the tower which is more accessible.

Setting Overview:

Norcot is a residential suburb of Tilehurst, 3 miles west of the Reading urban area. The single storey building in question sits within the established residential area next to the prominent red brick circular water tower built in the 1890s. Traditionally Tilehurst mainly had a population of farm labourers and agricultural workers, however in 1885 Tilehurst became the location for a large scale brick and tile works with clay being dug from local pits. The closest works to the tower being Kew Kiln and Kentwood Kiln and likely the source of its building materials for both buildings. Kew Kiln later became the location for Tilehurst Potteries. There was huge demand for the building materials made in Tilehurst as houses were built in increasing numbers with the growth of the Reading area. The population of the local area grew as a result of these works. Production for the works peaked at around the time that the tower was built however production continued steadily and in 1936 over 20 million items were still being produced. Clay was dug from pits on Norcot Hill and taken to the Kilns on Kentwood Hill.

A pumping station and the tower were built by the Tilehurst and Pangbourne Water Works to serve both demands of the large brickworks and its workforce and can be seen on the extract from the 1912 map below. The Tilehurst and Pangbourne Water Board became the Reading Corporation following the Reading Water Order 1899.



By World War II the brickworks were becoming less popular as more modern methods of manufacturing had been adopted elsewhere and Kew Kiln eventually ceased operations. The pits were eventually closed in 1967 and the area subsequently became covered in housing. A replacement water tower was built by the Reading Corporation on Park Lane, Tilehurst in the 1930s (also Listed) but the Norcot tower is understood to have remained in operation until 1947 when Reading Council took over the water supply to the area and sold off the land.

During World War II both water towers were recorded as being used as a fire watching points. When the war ended there was a huge undertaking to rebuild Reading with a focus on better housing. At this point the land containing Norcot Tower was sold off and is understood to have become a builders yard to facilitate the great rebuild, possibly an additional one for the Francis Bros who were big employers in the local area.

The caretakers store and lodging which is the single storey building immediately adjacent in question first appears on the 1962 OS mapping (see extract below) as one of many but not on the 1934 OS mapping so a date can be assumed to have been built between these time periods as part of its operation as a builders yard. The store was built of a simple but high quality and appears to be one of many showing on the historic OS maps. It was not excluded from the Listed description when the building was Listed in 1990 and the building was clearly functioning as part of the yard.



The tower was then converted into 6 x 2 bedroom residential flats plus 2 houses (ref 991570) and the store building in question is understood to have been renovated at the same time however was never properly used for the purpose of a store and has become derelict and vacant over time. It is also prone to fly tipping resulting in an unsightly appearance.

This is a record photo of the store in 2008 taken from the Reading Council planning records which shows it additional wing which is now removed.



Impacted Heritage Assets:



Map taken from Historic England Listing Database. Property shown with a red dot.

The building is not within a Conservation Area.

The building itself is not a Listed building however clearly was a curtilage building at the point of Listing and was not noted as being excluded as part of the Listing which would have been standard at this moment in time.

Description:

List Entry Number: 1113623

Date first listed: 10-Apr-1990

Statutory Address: WATER TOWER, NORCOT ROAD

TILEHURST NORCOT ROAD SU 67 SE (south side, off) 16/650 Water Tower II Water tower, now storage. Late C19. Red brick in English bond. Circular plan. 3 stages, each with semi-circular header blind arcading, punctuated alternately with sash windows with glazing bars and semi-circular heads set in orange brick surrounds. Each stage has a moulded brick string course. The top stage has circular windows with glazing bars in groups of 3 with small opening lights in centre. Planked entrance door with semi-circular head and flat canopy on north. Loading bay with derrick on west in first stage.

Listing NGR: SU6724573808.

The building is not within an area where there is known below ground archaeology and indeed the HER records as part of the local house building show evaluation trenching in 2013 in the local area recorded no archaeological activity.

Assessment of Significance:

Heritage has cultural, social, economic and environmental values. The attributes that combine to define the significance of a historic building can relate to its physical properties or to its context. – BS 7913:2013..

The water tower is of architectural merit and reflective of the social and economic development of the local area driven by the local brick works which were an important part of the architectural history of Reading and Berkshire. The buildings materiality reflects the building products and skill set of the local community as well as illustrating the technological ability of the area at that point in time. When it was replaced by a newer water tower, and was subsequently sold off, the tower and site was given a new use reflective of the historic need to re-build Reading after WWII.

The store building reflects that change of use of the site to a builders yard and is the only remaining visual representation/ evidential value of the rebuilding of Reading after WWII. The store building is an established building of a good build quality, approximately 74/75 years in age, and appears to be the last remaining of a number of buildings on the site that illustrate its history. Its build date is highly likely to be around the time of the cut off date for the protection of curtilage buildings of July 1948 (Historic England Listing and Curtilage Advice Note 10) forming part of the listing for the water tower.

The store building is a simple building and has a lesser heritage value than its water tower neighbor but is still of architectural merit and worthy of retention due to its evidential value of illustrating the changes to the site over time as part of the larger story of the rebuilding of Reading.



Record photo of a worker at Tilehurst Potteries within a typical storage yard for the area



Collier Brickworks War Memorial

Development Impact on the Historical Asset:

Building Elevations and Setting: The change of use is respectful of the existing building elevations and enhances the setting of the water tower which has at large been neglected as part of the housing development works. It brings a redundant curtilage building back into viable use. The proposed landscaping will ensure that the area immediately around the tower has an defined custodian that will ensure its maintenance and upkeep in the longer term, something that it currently suffers from a lack of. This is a positive investment in the setting of the historic asset.

Internally: The current interior is of little value and there is no loss of evidential or historical value as part of these proposals.

Scale and Massing: there is no impact upon the scale and massing of existing architecture. Additional massing has not been added to the building.

Archeaology: There is no known below ground archaeology based on previous evaluation trenches and mapping in the local area.

Use: The building currently has no use since it failed to be used properly following the conversion of the site from a builders yard to a residential property. We believe it is part of the history of the development of the site and requires new purpose. The site is now fully residential and therefore this usage is a logical conclusion.

Design concept/ Reason for Development:

Refer to the Architects Design and Access Statement.

Relevant Policy:

The Government has set out its planning policies for the historic environment in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This was published in March 2012 and replaced in 2018 and 2019. It replaced Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. The PPS5 Practice Guide remains valid for use alongside the NPPF.

In determining applications, the NPPF explains at paragraph 189 that local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.

Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- (a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- (b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- (c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Historic England 'Conservation Principles' deem new work or alteration to be normally acceptable where the proposals do not materially harm the value of the place. They consider the setting of the heritage asset to contribute greatly to its significance. They accept that a heritage setting changes over time.

The local authority guidance also includes policies which seek to ensure the protection of the historic environment and that development is of a high quality and seeks to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Heritage Asset. Changes to the setting of historic buildings / Conservation Areas are to be sympathetic in terms of siting, proportion, scale, form, height, materials and detailing.

Conclusion:

The existing building in question however small is part of the historical development of the site as part of the story of the Water Tower, the Tilehurst Potteries and the rebuilding of Reading post WWII and has been retained to date as such due to its build quality. It shows evidential value in the rebuilding of the Reading area following WWII and we believe is of sufficient architectural merit to be worthy of retention. As such it needs new purpose as it has not been utilized by residents as a store.

The existing building is unused and its lack of use is currently detrimental to the setting of the Listed building. The land around the tower also lacks defined ownership, someone to care for it which is something remedied by the proposals. The internal alterations maximise the use of space, securing their viable use whilst respecting the existing building lines. There is no loss of historic features.

We believe the one bedroom starter home will provide a good accommodation for someone in a building of character and historical value, in an area that has been identified as having a housing shortage. We can see no reason from a heritage perspective why this would not be acceptable as being used for residential purpose given the conversion allowed for the rest of the site and we can see that no material harm to the site is likely to arise from this.

We believe that it is likely that the building would have been built at the point of its change in ownership and change of use to a builders yard in 1947 as part of the drive to rebuild Reading, was present at the point of Listing, and as such is offered protection under the Historic England Guidance as a curtilage building.

The proposals act in accordance with the requirements of the local authority as well in accordance with Historic England development guidelines and policies.

Survey date: 20/01/2021

Surveyor: Michelle Purnell *BA(hons), BArch, RIBA, MSc Building Conservation*