

# 82 Crescent Road, Reading RG1 5SP

## Heritage information

### 1 Introduction

The owners of 82 Crescent Road, Reading RG1 5SP, wish to demolish an existing link-attached single-storey garage and replace it with a new extension, which would be of two storeys on a similar footprint to the garage. The latter's double doors are set level with the front of the house, and its canopy extends further forward still. The new extension would be set well back behind the frontage. The owners and their agents, Fineline Architects, are applying to Reading Borough Council for pre-application advice with regard to planning permission. The house is one of many built in this area during the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is not a listed building, but is situated in the south-east corner of the South Park Conservation Area (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> This brief report has therefore been commissioned to provide heritage information to support the application for planning advice.

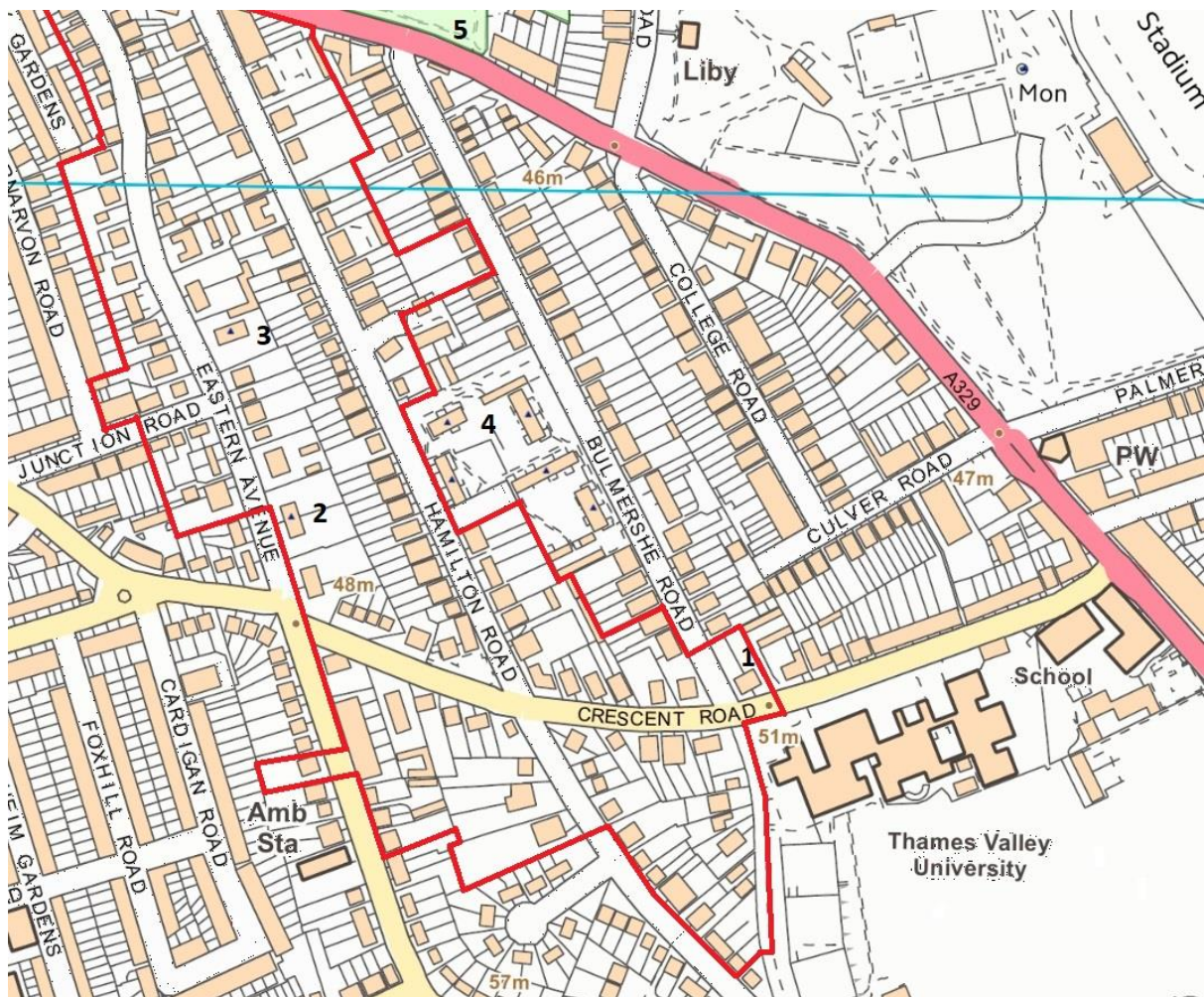


Figure 1: Site location map with 82 Crescent Road identified (1). Listed buildings (all Grade II): 39-41 Eastern Avenue (2); 29-31 Eastern Avenue (3); and Oaklands (4). Site 5 = Reading Cemetery (Grade II Registered Park/Garden). The South Park Conservation Area boundary is indicated in red. Ordnance Survey data Crown Copyright 2021. All rights reserved. Licence number 100051221.

<sup>1</sup> [https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/South\\_Park\\_full.pdf](https://images.reading.gov.uk/2019/12/South_Park_full.pdf)

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## 2 Brief historical overview

The Conservation Area Appraisal notes that “the earliest houses date from around the 1840s (for example the listed buildings), with a steady spread of development through the nineteenth century. The area is however interspersed with a number of more modern flat developments which tend to offer less to the character of the Conservation Area than the older buildings, although there are good examples of modern infill developments of individual houses, which preserve the character and appearance of the area”. The Tithe Maps of the Parishes of Reading St Giles (1839) and Earley (1840) confirm that the South Park area was completely undeveloped at that time, mostly comprising open agricultural land between the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Whiteknights Park (Figures 2a and 2b). The two listed buildings on Eastern Avenue are among the earliest in the area, both dating to the 1840s (the deeds of 39-41 give 1845 for its construction). Nos 82-84 have some stylistic similarities with 29-31 and 39-41 Eastern Avenue but are of a rather more standardised Classical design, and most likely represent part of the extensive ‘second wave’ of housing development across the area. A date between 1850 and c 1870 seems likely: they were certainly present when the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map was published in 1877 (the survey for this was carried out in 1872-7; Figure 3).

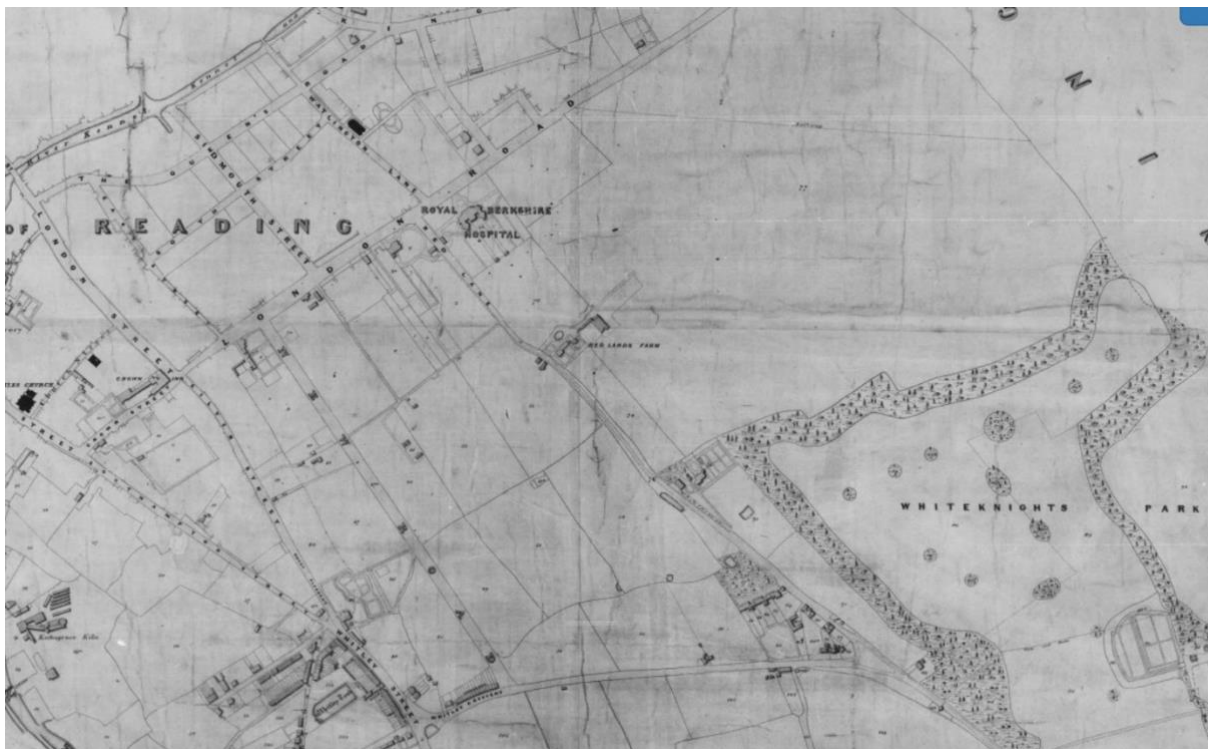


Figure 2a: Extract from the 1839 Tithe Map for the Parish of St Giles, with London Road, the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Whiteknights Park identified.

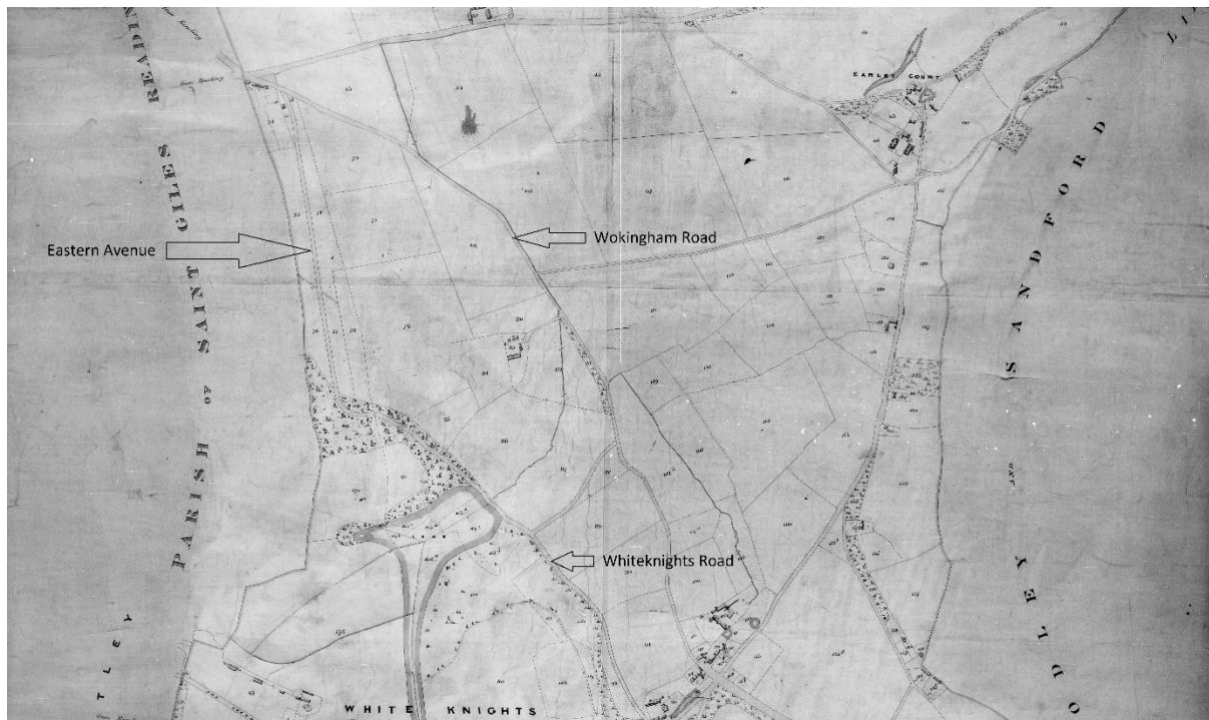


Figure 2b: Extract from the 1840 Tithe Map for the Parish of Earley. Eastern Avenue is unnamed but clearly identifiable, providing a key recognisable feature in what would soon become the South Park area. The fields to the east of the Avenue (which include the site of 82-84 Crescent Road) were all listed as arable in the Tithe Apportionment.

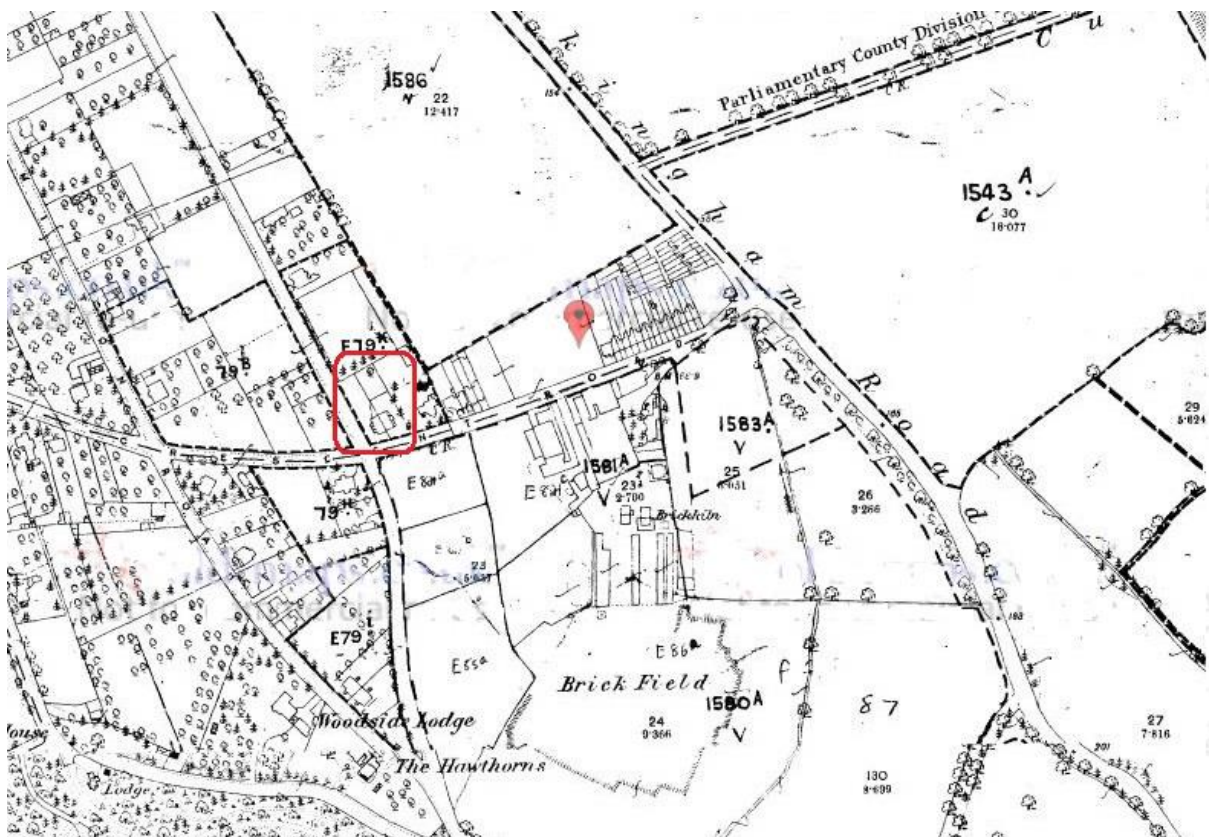


Figure 3: Extract from the 1877 1<sup>st</sup> edition 25 inch to the mile (1:2500) OS map of Reading, with 82-84 Crescent Road highlighted. Comparing this with Figure 1 shows that the area was developed in several stages during the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Note the brickworks south of Crescent Road.

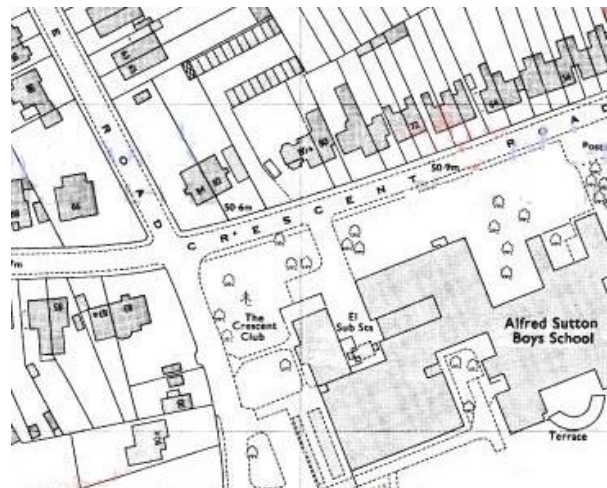


Figure 4: Extracts from the 1934 (top), 1958 (bottom left) and 1972-74 (bottom right) OS 1:2500 maps showing 82-84 Crescent Road

Figure 4 shows that the area around 82 and 84 Crescent Road continued to develop during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The site of the old brickworks in particular underwent several changes of use during this time, culminating in the school which still occupies the site (it is just outside the Conservation Area). More importantly, the earlier map shows 82 and 84 in their original state, but in 1958 both had a new garage (no doubt built after World War II). The garage for 82 had been rebuilt on a larger scale by 1972-4. No 84's garage was rebuilt in the 1990s: the planning reference (95/0674) described the work as "demolition of existing pre-fabricated garage and erection of new detached garage and garden store". No 82's earlier garage was most likely of the same pre-fabricated type as well: the 1970s replacement is of blockwork.

### 3 The property today

Nos 82 and 84 Crescent Road form a pair of semi-detached houses of three storeys each, raised over a semi-basement (Figures 5-7). They are rendered, and share a central chimney stack in the hipped

slate roof. Each house has its entrance to the side, in a small attached block rising to first-floor level. The Conservation Area Appraisal notes that these are additions. They set back from the frontages, with the entrance doors giving access to a central corridor on the (raised) ground floor. Steps up to the entrance sit outside the attached blocks.



Figure 5: Top: 82 (right) and 84 seen from the southern pavement of Crescent Road. Bottom: views of the rear of No 82, with the garage to the left. The basement extension and courtyard were built in the mid-2010s, in accordance with a certificate of lawfulness for permitted development (Reading Borough Council planning ref 12/01099/CLP).

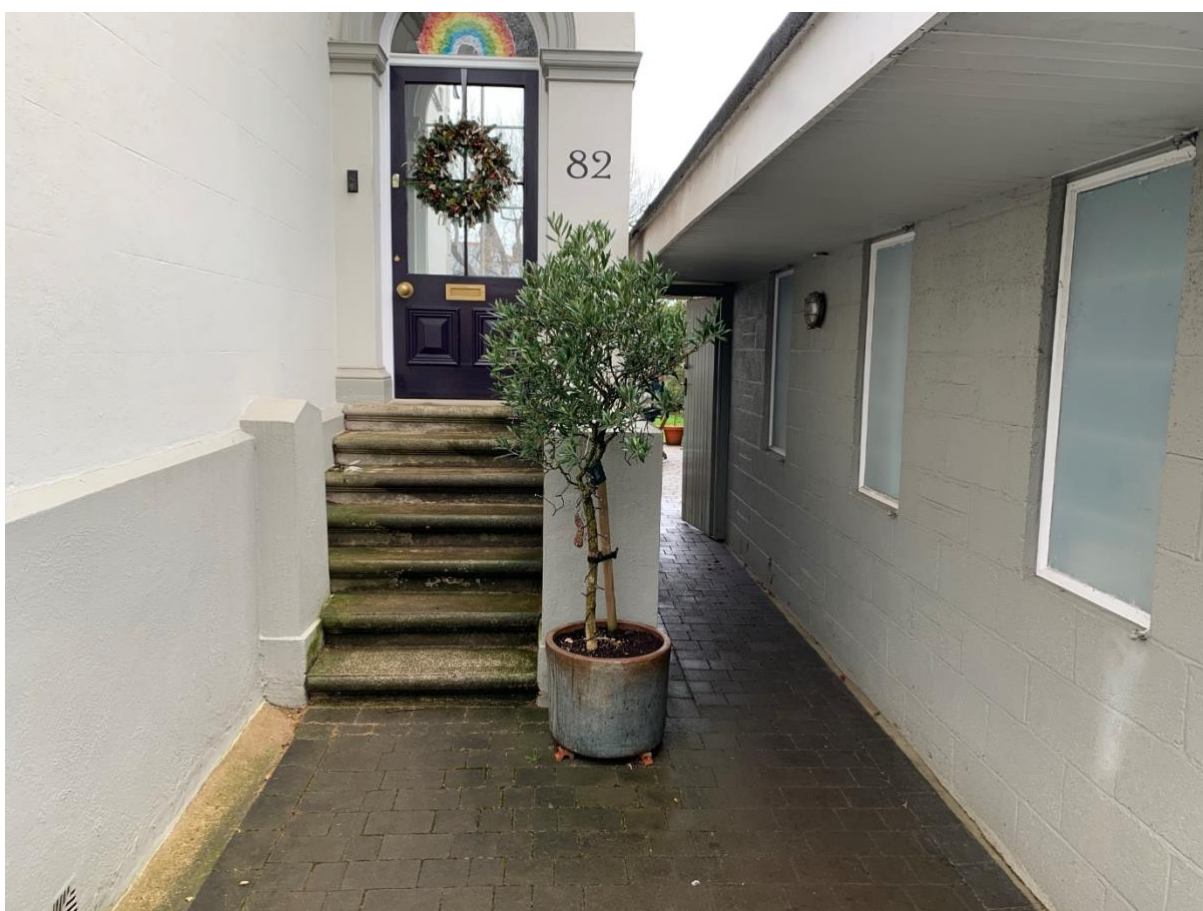


Figure 6: Views of the blockwork garage linked to 82's entrance turret.

## 4 Heritage background

There is only one Scheduled Monument within a 2km radius of 82 Crescent Road (which is located at National Grid Reference SU 7367 7268) – the site of Reading Abbey,<sup>2</sup> c 1.75km to the west-north-west. This overlaps with Forbury Gardens,<sup>3</sup> Grade II listed on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historical Interest in England. Reading Cemetery (c 430m to the north of Crescent Road) is the only other Registered Park/Garden (also at Grade II<sup>4</sup>) within the same radius/area. An extension to 82 Crescent Road would not have any effect/impact on these designated heritage assets.

There are a few listed buildings in the vicinity of 82 Crescent Road. The closest is the group of five blocks of flats and maisonettes, 1-51 Oaklands, built in 1967 (they are outside the South Park Conservation Area).<sup>5</sup> The nearest of these is c 150m to the north-west of No 82. Nos 39-41 Eastern Avenue (listed as the White House Chiropractic Surgery)<sup>6</sup> is c 320m to the west-north-west of No 82, with 29-21 Eastern Avenue (listed as University of Reading School of Education)<sup>7</sup> being c 125m to the north of Nos 39-41. These are the only relevant listed buildings (all Grade II) when considering the proposed extension to 82 Crescent Road. South Park largely comprises streets of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses, some (like 82 and 84 Crescent Road) in substantial plots, but generally forming a densely built-up area. Intervening houses mean that replacing the existing garage with an extension would not have any effect/impact on the nearby listed buildings.

As already noted, South Park is a Conservation Area (CA). This was designated by Reading Borough Council in 1988. The semi-detached pair of 82 and 84 Crescent Road lie on the south-eastern edge of the CA. Though not listed, they are identified in the CA Appraisal as among numerous buildings of townscape merit. They are mid 19<sup>th</sup>-century date, in good condition, and can therefore be classed as non-designated heritage assets as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2019). The two listed buildings on Eastern Avenue are the only examples in the CA. The group at Oaklands lie immediately outside the east edge of the CA, between Hamilton and Bulmershe Roads.

## 5 The proposed development – preliminary heritage appraisal

The preliminary proposals are illustrated in a set of drawings by Fineline Architects. These reflect the owners' aspirations to improve the layout and residential accommodation of the property, while also retaining workshop space and providing home office facilities. The latter two items are very important for the owners.

The proposed alterations have little effect on the interior of 82 Crescent Road. The basement will require some small adjustments to the kitchen and modern rear extension, but these do not have any impact on the historic fabric or character of the building – not least because the alterations of c 8 years ago involved comprehensive modernisation of this part of the house. The relationship of the house's interior to the entrance block would also change slightly, but this would not affect the inside as such.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1007932>

<sup>3</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000586>

<sup>4</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001641>

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1408854>

<sup>6</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1248720>

<sup>7</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1321939>

The proposals involve three distinct but related elements. These are

- Demolition of the existing garage and workshop (this is currently given over to the workshop in its entirety);
- Construction of a two-storey extension to replace the garage, on a similar footprint but pulled back from the frontage of the house; and
- Remodelling the entrance block to improve the existing access to the house, and also its connectivity with the new extension.

The proposed alterations are assessed in sequence below. The assessment is based on Fineline Architects' plans, a site visit made by the author on 16 February 2021, and discussions with both the client and the architects. The Conservation Area Appraisal also provides an important context for the project.

The double garage/workshop probably dates from the early 1970s (or the 1960s at earliest). It is of no historical interest or aesthetic merit. Its form is not sympathetic to the design, proportions or character of the house. It seems most unlikely that its removal would be contentious, because its size, position in line with/in front the house, poor design quality and materials are visually intrusive. The canopy is also physically intrusive. The garage is built from the existing ground level and thus has an odd visual relationship with the semi-basement and ground floor of the house. Its visual impact is somewhat reduced in street views by trees and shrubs (Figure 8), but its removal is desirable even so.

Despite its inferior quality and poor design, the garage provides essential storage and workshop space for the owners. The house itself seems substantial but aspects of its layout are in fact poor, especially for a young family. Play areas and office space for home working are inadequate, while reliance on the side entrance (especially the steps) causes significant practical difficulties. Building a two-storey extension addresses all these issues, providing essential improvements to the house's layout and facilities for the owners' family. Two storeys are necessary so that the workshop can be retained while also providing greatly improved access, cycle space, storage and cleaning areas for wet weather gear, as well as a new office, play space and utility room/toilet facilities. Use of two storeys rather than one is therefore readily justified.

The architects have provided a design which is in keeping with and sympathetic to the form of the original house, but does not seek to mimic it. The use of render in two tones matches the aesthetic of the property (Nos 82 and 84 have been painted in slightly different colour schemes for many years), and it seems appropriate not to expose any of the core building materials given that the original design does not do this. Windows and doors are of appropriate type/style but do not seek to copy the originals, meaning that old and new can be readily distinguished. The string courses provide reference to the strong horizontal emphasis of the existing frontage, but again their different heights (dictated by the variance in floor and ground levels) mean that there is no confusion or physical clash with the original design. The new extension will also be set well back from the front elevation. The overall design is successful in being in keeping with but fully subservient to the original house form. In Conservation Area terms, the design retains the original form and features of the existing building (and its boundary walls), but extends the house sympathetically so that its family residential use is not only preserved but also substantially enhanced.



Figure 7: 82 Crescent Road seen from the south-east, with the entrance block and garage visible – the latter’s canopy cuts across the line of the front door in this view. Note that the entrance to 84 cannot be seen from here. Indeed both entrance blocks can only be seen together from directly in front of the houses (see Figure 5) or from the very end of the rear gardens. The symmetry of the houses is notable, but the contribution of the entrance blocks to this is surprisingly limited.

The existing garage also provides a degree of sheltered/safe access to the rear of the property, not least for bicycles (stored within and outside the garage), and a vital second entrance for the owners in wet weather. The entrance block is very poor from this specific perspective, but generally it is poor anyway for a family with young children. Improving the utility of the main entrance while enhancing the secondary one via the side and rear are important aspects of the proposals. This is achieved by bringing part of the entrance block forwards so that the stairs would land at the front of the house rather than behind it. The design of the block would be replicated in its entirety in the new forward location, using the existing materials wherever possible and copying them where this cannot be achieved. The alteration provides vital internal linkages between the existing house and the proposed extension, and thus greatly improves the utility and sustainability of the property as a whole. The original design and features are kept while achieving this, but repositioned slightly to maximise the physical benefits of the new arrangements.



Figure 8: Nos 84 (foreground) and 82 from the south-west corner of Crescent Road and Bulmershe Road.

Visually, the proposed alterations will have surprisingly little impact on the Conservation Area and its setting. The property is at its south-east edge, opposite the school/college, and is rightly identified as being of townscape merit in the Conservation Area Appraisal. Despite the corner location, however, 82 Crescent Road makes a limited visual contribution to the Area and its setting – 84 is much more important. The proposed extension would only be visible in front-on views such as Figures 5 and 7 (which was taken from outside the CA): it would have little or no visibility in most views within the CA, as Figures 8-9 show.



Figure 9: Views of 82-84 Crescent Road looking south-east (top) and north-east along Bulmershe Road February 2021. The same views would be much less open in Spring to Autumn with the trees in leaf. Note the 1990s garage to the rear of 84 in the upper photograph.

Section 16 (Conserving the Historic Environment) Paragraph 201 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) states that “not all elements of a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 195 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 196, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole”. The proposal does not involve the loss of a building qualifying under the terms of this paragraph. The garage does not make a positive contribution to the significance of the South Park Conservation Area and the entrance block (which does) is retained, albeit in an adapted form. The proposals therefore do not constitute harm in terms of paragraph 201.

## Conclusion

The proposals remove a modern garage of unsympathetic form and design, replacing it with a new two-storey extension. This provides much-needed improvements to the house’s living and working spaces, while also greatly enhancing its accessibility. The house is not listed but has local importance as a mid-later 19<sup>th</sup>-century building on the edge of the South Park Conservation Area. The extension has been designed to respect and be subservient to the original building, which will hardly be altered internally at all. The entrance block will be reconfigured (enhancing its practical value) but its design and original features are retained. The proposals have minimal impact on the Conservation Area due to the property’s marginal location within it – only limited views of the east side of 82 Crescent Road are available from the south-east parts of the CA, with none from further afield. The proposals are in line with the Conservation Area Appraisal’s guidance, and are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework’s section (16) on conserving the historic environment. They do not cause harm to the heritage significance of the house, the South Park Conservation Area, or its setting. We trust that Reading Borough Council will agree with this assessment.

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February 2021