

HERITAGE STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF HURST GROVE ESTATES

LAND AT 45 UPPER REDLANDS ROAD

READING RG1 5JE

Oxford Archaeology, December 2019

Reading Borough Council

Land at No. 45 Upper Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5JE

Proposal: Erection of 4 dwelling houses and a detached garage, including vehicle accesses with associated landscaping and parking.

1. Introduction

Oxford Archaeology has been asked to provide a Heritage Statement by the applicant, Hurst Grove Estates. A previous Heritage Statement by the Historic Environment Consultancy dealt generally with planning and heritage matters, whereas this statement specifically looks at impacts on listed and historic buildings, and the Conservation Area. It is based on consideration of the historic development of the site and a site visit, and takes into account comments from council officers, advisors, and members of the public on previous applications for this site.

1.2 *Location of the site*

The site of the proposed development lies in the block to the east of Redlands Road, between New Road on the south, and Upper Redlands Road on the north. The proposal is to build a pair of houses (Plots 1 & 2) on Redlands Road between no. 45 Upper Redlands Road and nos 17/19 Redlands Road, with a shared garage on the existing empty plot in New Road to the rear of nos 17/19 Redlands Road and adjacent to no. 1 New Road; and two more houses (Plot nos 3 & 4) together in Upper Redlands Road between no. 45 and no. 43. The whole property block lies within the Redlands Conservation Area but none of the buildings is listed. On the north side of Upper Redlands Roads is the Grade II listed Wantage Hall of the University of Reading.

2. Heritage Assets

2.1 *The Conservation Area*

The Redlands Conservation Area (designated in 1991) is essentially an area of Victorian/Edwardian housing on new roads constructed between the middle of the 19th century and the Great War. The origins and development of the area has been well described in Adam Sowen, *A quiet and intimate road A History of New Road Reading* (privately

printed, 2016), which emphasises the gradual development through building opportunities that formed the essential character described in the *Conservation Area Appraisal* (2008). This drew attention to 'the sheer variety, exuberance and blending of the architectural styles of Victorian period in such close proximity' as making the area 'attractive and worthy of Conservation Area status'.

In addition to the architecture of the houses themselves, as is usual with Victorian suburbs the spacious streets, tree planting and boundary features contribute to the overall sense of place, though again there is variety in this rather than rigid conformity to a designed plan.

2.1 *The Listed Building*

Wantage Hall: The one prominent feature on the corner of Redlands and Upper Redlands Roads is the Grade II listed Wantage Hall, opened in 1908 as the first Hall of residence of University College, Reading (which had been established in 1892 and achieved chartered status as a university in its own right in 1926). Built on the site of an earlier house of red brick and in Tudor style, the two-storey building is set back with tree planting along the road frontage. It has a low brick wall along the frontage, with dark brick patterning and dentilled coping; outside the main entrance tower is the central pedestrian access with curved flanking walls, and two modern vehicle entrances have been made in the wall further east.

2.1 *Houses in the Upper Redlands/New Road Block*

Upper Redlands Road: On the opposite corner on Wantage Hall, No. 45 Upper Redlands Road is a large rendered mid-Victorian house in Italianate villa style, with white painted window surrounds and deep eaves. set in very ample grounds and surrounded with a red brick wall having a prominent dentilled cornice and pilasters on the west and part of the north side (and a plainer one beyond that). On the east side of the house is a contemporary brick building that was probably a stable and carriage house; and while originally the garden extended round this to the east and all around the south side of the house, the garden area east of the 'stable' has now been separated off, part of which forms **Plot nos 3 & 4** of the development.

In 1879 all the houses in this block were present on the OS 25-inch map, including the separate unbuilt plot to the east of No. 45 which is now proposed for development. This plot is fronted to Upper Redlands Road by the same tall brick wall with a simple dentil coping that continues eastwards from the 'carriage entrance' to the stable block of No. 45, and has a single pedestrian door in it. The wall terminates at No. 43, just opposite the south-east corner of Wantage Hall.

In the 1911 Census this was the family home of the Professor of Geography at the University.

Lying to the east of number 45 and **Plot nos 3 & 4** is no. 43 Upper Redlands Road, a detached Italianate villa of white painted stucco, with a hipped slate roof, and low iron railings to the front garden.

Beyond it a semi-detached pair no. 39/41, painted white and with a hedge on the pavement frontage.

Redlands Road: To the south of the garden of No. 45 and proposed **Plot nos 1 & 2** is a pair of semi-detached three-storey Italianate houses, also rendered and painted white. They have what is quite probably the original front garden wall of painted and rendered brickwork, divided into regular panels with a framed X-pattern, just as if they were cast-iron panels. The wall continues to the corner of New Road, where it turns and then continues as a plain brick wall with a rounded brick coping. This pair of houses has a very large garden plot, though smaller than that to the north just described, and even with the fenced-off plot of the proposed **Garage** for the development it still retains a substantial garden.

New Road: To the east of Nos 17 & 19 Redlands Road (and the proposed **Garage** plot) in New Road are two pairs of red brick Georgian/ Italianate style semi-detached houses of two stories with hipped slate roofs and deep eaves. They have a grey brick plat band and cut or rubbed bricks over the doors and windows, and separate treatment of the front with brick wall, lapped fencing and hedges. The houses beyond this are three (or 2½) storey houses of red brick with white brick details and decoration, while on the south side of the road are three-story gables houses of red brick, grey and yellow brick, a stuccoed Italianate pair and then more brick terracing of varied character and appearance.

2.3 *Conservation Area Character*

From this description it can be seen that the character of the Conservation Area is decidedly one of variety, both in materials and architectural character, but at the same time with no discordance of style. A further feature of the Conservation Area in the vicinity of the proposed development is the very wide spacing of gaps between some of the existing properties, which rather has the appearance of being an unfinished scheme rather than the result of deliberate design. It cannot be said with certainty that the spatial layout was part of any primary plan and it seems, as often with Victorian suburban development, that this may have been the result more of the haphazard builders' market than intention.

3. The Current Proposals and their Impact

3.1 *Plot 1 & 2 on Redlands Road*

Plot 1& 2 will consist of a semi-detached pair of villas with bay windows, maintaining the spacing, proportion, and hierarchy of the adjacent properties, by being subservient to Nos 17 and 19 Redlands, while maintaining the generous garden setting of No. 45 Upper Redlands Road. Since the vehicular access to the properties will be on New Road, there will only need

to be two pedestrian entrances made through the existing garden walls on Redlands Road, with a minimal change in character on the street frontage.

3.2 *Garage Plot on New Road*

The Garage Plot will occupy a currently fenced that continues the property spacing in New Road, and is a modest brick building with a hipped roof, set well back from the street and designed to be in keeping with the architecture of No. 1 New Road, while maintaining the generous garden setting of Nos 17 and 19 Redlands, which will retain their historic character of a large garden setting.

3.3 *Plots 3 & 4 on Upper Redlands Road*

Plots 3 & 4 will occupy the very large garden space to the east of No. 45 Upper Redlands Road, behind the higher and plainer length of garden wall. They will each be stepped back from No. 43, and maintain the property spacing in Upper Redlands Road, while being designed to be in keeping with the architectural scale of nos. 39-41, and also maintaining the generous garden setting of No. 45 Upper Redlands Road.

3.4 *Impact on heritage assets*

There will be no impact whatsoever on the setting of the Grade II listed Wantage Hall from the development, as the listed building will remain in the context of domestic buildings in a tree-lined road, with no significant impact on its character or appearance. Neither will any changes in views from residential buildings in the Conservation Area affect the setting of the listed building in the Conservation Area. These matters are considered further below.

4. *General Considerations*

4.1 *Loss of garden space*

A recognised feature of the Conservation Area in the vicinity of the proposed development (Character Area 1) is the very wide spacing of gaps between some of the existing properties, though this rather has the appearance of being an unfinished scheme rather than the result of deliberate design. It cannot be said with certainty that the spatial layout was part of any primary plan and it seems, as often with Victorian suburban development, that this may have been the result more of the haphazard builders' market than intention.

None of the proposed new buildings will look out of place or appear to be uncomfortably intruded into an existing layout; in essence, the very large garden of No. 45 Upper Redlands Road was so extensive that it can accommodate new buildings while wholly maintaining its historic character of a villa in large grounds, and thus preserving the general character of the Conservation Area. The proposed new buildings will do no harm to the character of the Conservation Area.

4.2 *Loss of garden walls*

The very restricted lengths of wall removal can hardly amount to a sustainable objection. Access to Plots 1&2 will necessitate breaching the red brick wall on Redlands Road with the dentilled cornice in two places for pedestrian access; Plots 3&4 will have a single vehicular access through the higher and less elaborate wall, while the Garage plot entry from New Road will have an entrance similar to the existing one in the plain brick wall. These openings will be of modest extent, will be flanked by brick piers of an appropriate character, and will not look out of place. The walls are of such length (on both north and west sides) that the additional openings will not significantly detract from the character and interest of the walls or their contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area. There is considerable variety in the frontage treatment throughout the Conservation Area, and these minor changes to the one wall will not have a more general impact on historic character. None of the alterations to the walls will do harm to the character of the Conservation Area.

4.3 *Over-development in Conservation Area*

The proposed development will not have a significance impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, partly because of the diverse architectural character recognised by the Conservation Area Appraisal, and also because the new buildings are fitted into spaces that could have had buildings constructed at any time in the 19th or 20th century. The buildings are of an appropriate scale and materials, and (on Plot 3 & 4 are set back in a manner to make the less obtrusive.

The proposed new buildings (as shown in the elevation drawings), will not appear to intrude into the generous spaces around the present buildings, and in all the key views into and across the site. The unusually wide spacing of properties in the Conservation Area (probably caused by historical accident rather than design) allows for sensitive infilling without detracting from character, and so the character and appearance of the Conservation Area will still be readily apparent, and the new buildings will do no harm to the character of the Conservation Area.

4.4 *Setting of Listed Wantage Hall*

The Grade II listed Wantage Hall, dating from 1908 was an early addition to Upper Redlands Road, replacing a pre-existing house. It was built as the first Hall of residence of University College, Reading (which had been established in 1892 and achieved chartered status as a university in its own right in 1926). Built on the site of a pre-existing house, it is of red brick and in Tudor style, the two-storey building is set back with tree planting along the road frontage. It was the first institutional appearance in the residential area, to be followed by others as the University expanded, although it was itself residential. Architecturally it is 'out of character' with the Victorian suburb in sense of scale, though with its brick collegiate type building and tree-lined setting has taken its place in the Conservation Area and now forms part of its character (Character Area 1).

The arrival of new buildings envisaged in the current proposals will have no impact whatsoever on the setting of the Grade II listed Wantage Hall, as the listed building will

remain in the context of domestic buildings in a tree-lined road, with no significant impact on the character or appearance of the listed building. The single new vehicular access to Plots 3 & 4 will be opposite the two vehicular access points created recently in the front wall of the listed building.

None of the minimal changes in views of the listed building from residential buildings in the Conservation Area affect the setting of the listed building in the Conservation Area, while views from the listed building of the proposed development, where possible through the trees, will be minimally changed by the appearance of similar buildings in a garden setting with trees in the place of walls and trees.

Overall, the new proposed new buildings will in no way do harm to the setting of the Grade II listed Wantage Hall.

5. Conclusions

Despite the variety and complexity of issues around previous applications for this site, there are some fairly clear issues:

- the unusually wide spacing of properties in the Conservation Area (probably caused by historical accident rather than design) allows for sensitive infilling without detracting from character
- the proposed buildings are wholly in keeping with the materials, scale and character of Conservation Area
- unusually, the infilling of the sites will not give the appearance of overcrowding because such generous spaces have been left between existing properties
- the new building will not harm the setting of the Grade II listed Wantage Hall
- the minor alterations to the boundary wall are not of significant enough extent to do significant harm to the built fabric or character of the Conservation Area
- the new buildings will generally enhance and not detract from the character of the Conservation Area.

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY

OA (formerly the Oxford Archaeological Unit) was established in 1973 and has grown to be one of the largest archaeological practices in Europe, employing c.250 people including field archaeologists, heritage management, industrial, historic buildings and finds specialists, and a team of illustrators and computing and survey personnel. Oxford Archaeology has offices in Lancaster (Oxford Archaeology North), Cambridge (Oxford Archaeology East) and Oxford (Oxford Archaeology South).

OA offers a comprehensive range of archaeological and historical services including strategic policy advice, heritage management services, historic landscape assessment, desk-based appraisal, documentary research, field evaluation and survey, and full-scale excavation, building surveys, industrial archaeology and publication.

OA works on projects throughout the UK and abroad, recently completing extensive and complex projects in France, Ireland and Turkey with further work carried out in both Montserrat and St Lucia (West Indies), Greece, Albania, India, Libya, Oman, and China.

OA has long experience of environmental assessment, conservation and planning advice on a number of major and minor projects across England involving the protection, management and presentation of major national monuments, and World Heritage Sites.

JULIAN MUNBY BA, FSA

JM (a graduate of the Institute of Archaeology, London) is Head of Buildings Archaeology Department at OA, with over 40 years' experience of historic buildings and landscapes. He has extensive knowledge of the survey and publication of historic buildings and landscapes, ranging from the medieval period to the 19th century. He has worked at OA on historic buildings and landscape aspects of the assessment of High Speed Railways and other major infrastructure schemes, and has been involved in desktop studies on development impact studies for historic buildings and landscapes in the context of Environmental Assessment.

JM Has directed work for the National Trust on several properties including Osterley House and Chastleton, for the Historic Royal Palaces at Kensington Palace and the Tower of London, for English Heritage at Kenwood and Witley Court, and has surveyed monuments in Scotland, Ireland and the West Indies

JM has worked on Conservation Plans for the Tower of London, for English Heritage, at Audley End House and Osborne, on Framlingham and Orford castles, and at Portchester, Deal and Dover castles; for Lincolnshire County Council at Gainsborough Old Hall, and for the National Trust at Tyntesfield, Tattershall Castle and Knole; and for the Heritage Council Ireland on Kilkenny City Walls, and Athlone, Newtown Jerpoint, Carlingford and Fethard Town Walls. Most recently he has worked on Conservation Plans for Leeds Castle (Kent), Knole, and Dover Castle.

JM regularly gives advice on planning issues concerning historic buildings, sites and monuments, with regard to changes in the fabric and setting. He has appeared as an effective expert witness at Public Inquiries on a broad range of planning concerns.